

**THROUGH CHORA:  
CREATING "RECEPTACLE OF BECOMING" AS MEDIATOR OF THE PAST,  
PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE POST-INDUSTRIAL SITE IN VANCOUVER, FALSE  
CREEK FLATS**

by

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for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

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## **ABSTRACT**

Plato's concept of "Chora" is briefly defined as the interval between "being" and "becoming," which he interprets as a "receptacle of becoming," or site of creative potential. This paper seeks to examine the inherent Chora of False Creek Flats, a post-industrial site, which is in many ways a symbolic locus of the history of Vancouver. The intent is to envision a future "becoming" of that site – and of the city itself – by using architectural designs, which incorporate both the past and present structural elements of the area.

The proposed interventions are intended to provide the necessary catalyst to transform this stark, post-industrial site into the realm of poetic awareness in order to bring it into the consciousness of Vancouver's inhabitants. The site's various history both present and absent are translated through architectural interventions, combining materials, tectonic and programmatic relationships into spatial configuration, so that various elements of the site's history are revealed and inexplicably linked.



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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I would also like to thank my parents for their enduring support and love.

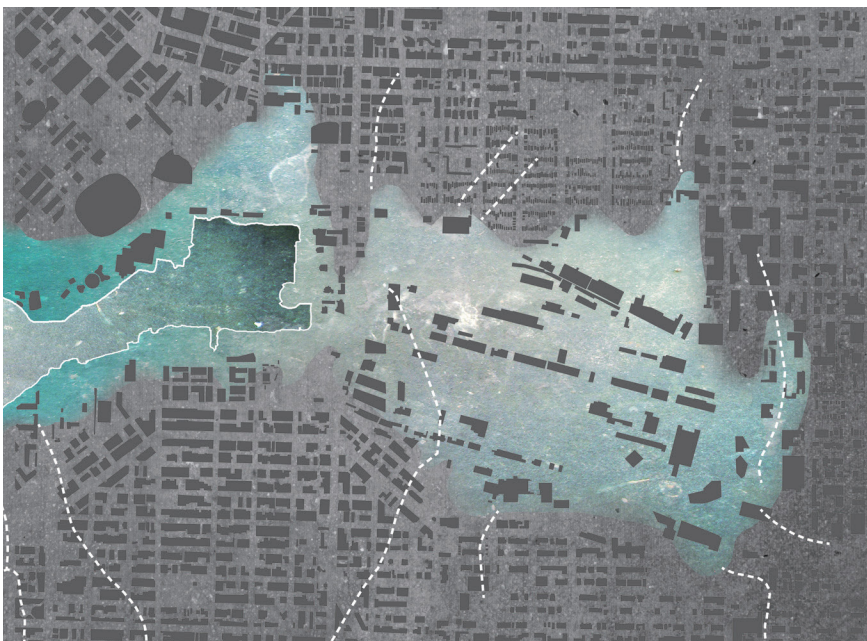
Further gratitude goes to my husband, Jay Alkana for his encouragement and support throughout the thesis.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### The Site, the Palimpsest

False Creek Flats was originally an area of tidal flats, as the name implies, where numerous creeks emptied into English Bay to the west of what is now downtown Vancouver (Bollwitt 2013). Because of the rich inter-tidal life, thousands of migratory birds lived in and around the flats. It formed a threshold between freshwater and seawater, between land and ocean, and the fine network of creeks also served as storm water infrastructure for the city in its early years.

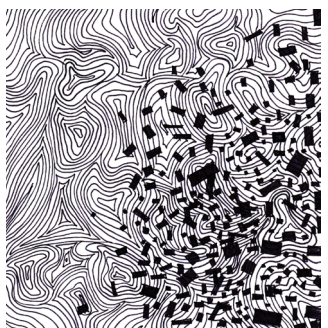
During the First World War, the flats were landfilled in order to facilitate the construction of a railway yard. The creeks were either filled in or piped out of the area, flowing underground as the city grew and industrialized the land above (Burkinshaw 1984, 6).



False Creek Flats site plan (data from City of Vancouver)



Salt water and fresh water



Nature and settlement



Palimpsest

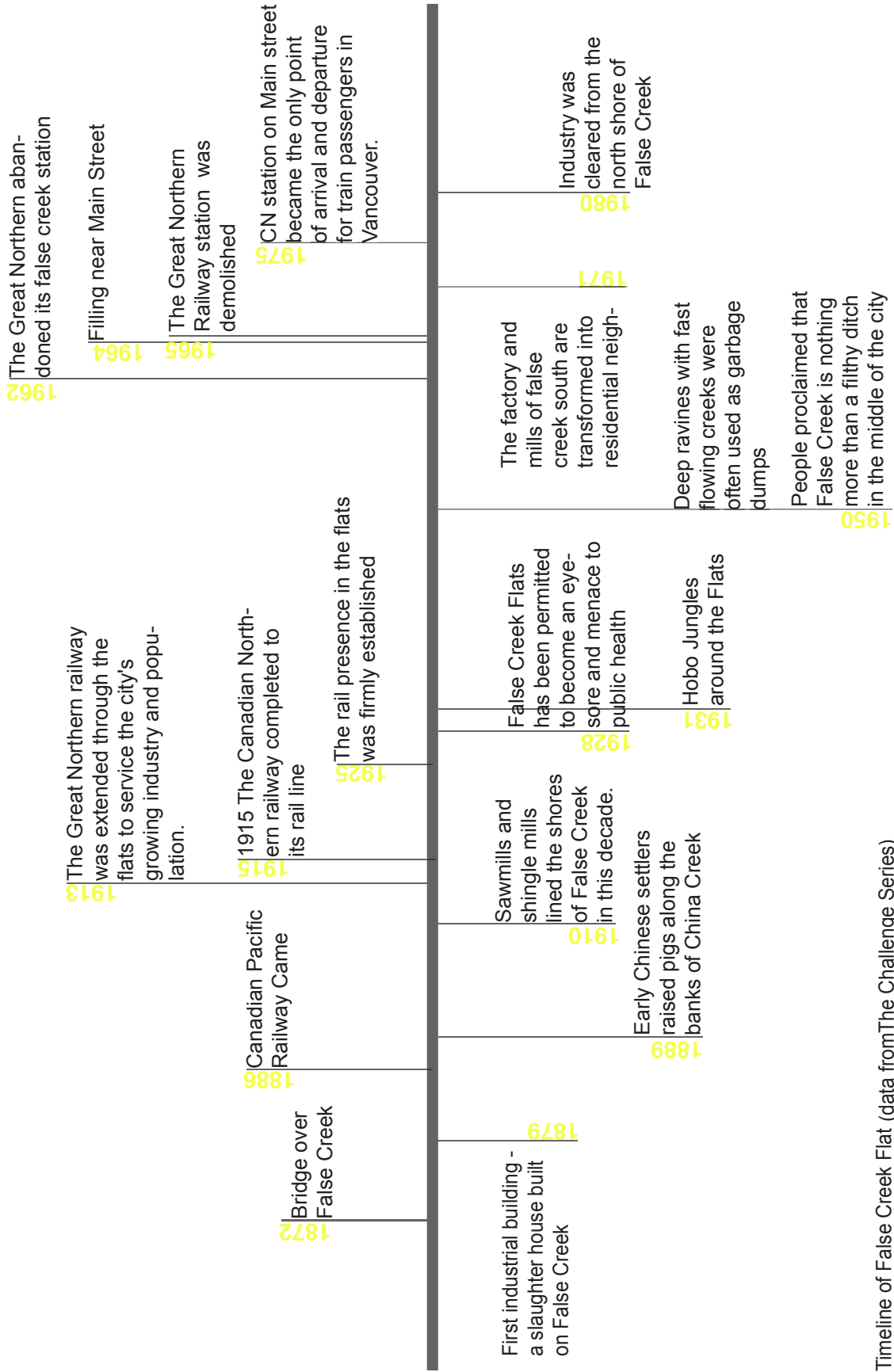


Fragmentary fabric

Abstract studies of site

Industrial growth gained momentum in this area upon completion of the railway yard, and the artificially created shoreline became a landscape of mills. The presence of heavy industry in Vancouver became very concentrated in the area of False Creek Flats, now being the western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway. However, within a few short decades, much of that development would begin to decay along the water's edge (Burkinshaw 1984, 14).

The site is a palimpsest which has been written, erased and rewritten again many times over the years. Much of the past has left traces in the form of buildings and other structures, some of which remain physically embedded in the earth. The transformation which the site has undergone is a reflection of the various processes and roles that the natural ecosystem of the tidal flats and industrialization has played in the historical development of Vancouver. It is also an example of how drastically the natural environment can be altered by human settlement.



Timeline of False Creek Flat (data from The Challenge Series)

### The “Walls”

In the analysis of the site, various lines of demarcation or virtual “walls” are uncovered. These “walls” in some cases are visible or literal barriers, but often they are invisible or abstract. The transformation of the site has been a gradual process of eradicating old “walls” in order to facilitate the creation of new ones. The “walls” are grounded in different layers of time, and although much remains of the past, much has also been lost. When all of these walls are simultaneously visualized – figuratively excavated or “surfaced” – the true nature of the site becomes apparent - clearly revealing its segregated and compartmentalized character. The presence or absence of each wall carries part of the history and memory of the site. Their gradual appearance and disappearance over time establishes a physical hierarchy in the time-space structure of False Creek Flats.



—— Present Walls

- - Absent Walls

The “Walls” (data from City of Vancouver)



### The Void

The ubiquitous presence of railway lines, box-shaped warehouses, utilitarian industrial buildings and the omnipresent sound of traffic mark this site as a kind of “gray zone” in the city of Vancouver. In comparison with its surroundings, the flats seem colorless and detached, forming a physical void within the urban environment. The site is an important perceptual void in the collective memory of Vancouver’s inhabitants. When viewed as void, its emptiness of it is both vitally dynamic and pregnant with possibility. What is the shape of this void? Where are its edges? Of what does its emptiness truly consist? The very concepts of presence and absence create vast opportunities for new interpretations of its apparent nothingness.



Site as void

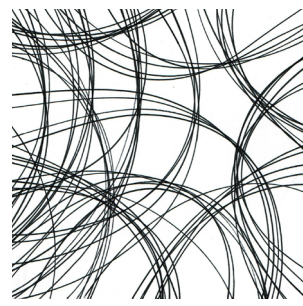
### **The Elements: Water and Ground**

All cities consist of a complexity of abundant natural elements. The historical memory of Vancouver – and in particular of False Creek Flats – is laden with the elements of water and ground. It could even be said that the poetics of the city itself are embodied in the metaphorical aspects and dynamic phenomena surrounding these two elements.

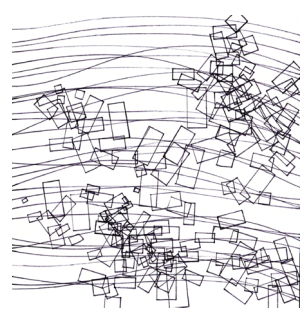
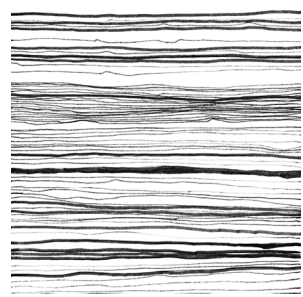
Vancouver is a city of water as evidenced by the ocean, the rain, the creeks, and of course the tidal flats themselves. The water which once flooded this area form an important historical layer to the site, surrounding and infusing the memory of the city as it flows down through the continuum of time. Even though the water is no longer able to encroach upon the land as it used to do, its poetic power can continue to be felt here at the continent's edge. Our connection with water is tangible. We feel it on our skin, sense its warmth or coolness, and can easily perceive its substantial nature. In spite of this, its inherent formlessness also seems to render it an intangible presence at times, making it ungraspable and strangely unreachable.

However important the element of water may be, the transformation of this site has been essentially a transformation of the ground. The ground on which a city is built forms a physical record of the process of human settlement, and it is helpful to remember that topography, in Greek, literally means the writing in the place (Spellman 2003, 26).

Ground is a receiver, it receives the shadows and our movement. It is stability, physical foundation of settlements. It is a surface dividing up the surface, isolating us from what is underneath. It is a creator, it shapes us and we shape it too. It is a container and it is inhabitable of a place. Geologically speaking, earth is a product of sedimentary layers which accumulate over time. It is also the receiver of everything from fleeting shadows to radical alterations. It represents stability, continuity, and the physical foundation of human life. Viewed another way, it is a plane which divides our world, hiding that which lies beneath the opaque surface. In a sense, it is a creator that it gently guides and shapes human development, but in turn is shaped by us ever more drastically as time goes on.



Water



Ground

Abstract studies of water and ground



## CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Emphermail installation constructed in the city as a way of linking poetry and space. Ciudad Abierta, Chile (Vergara 2013)

### Architecture and Poetry

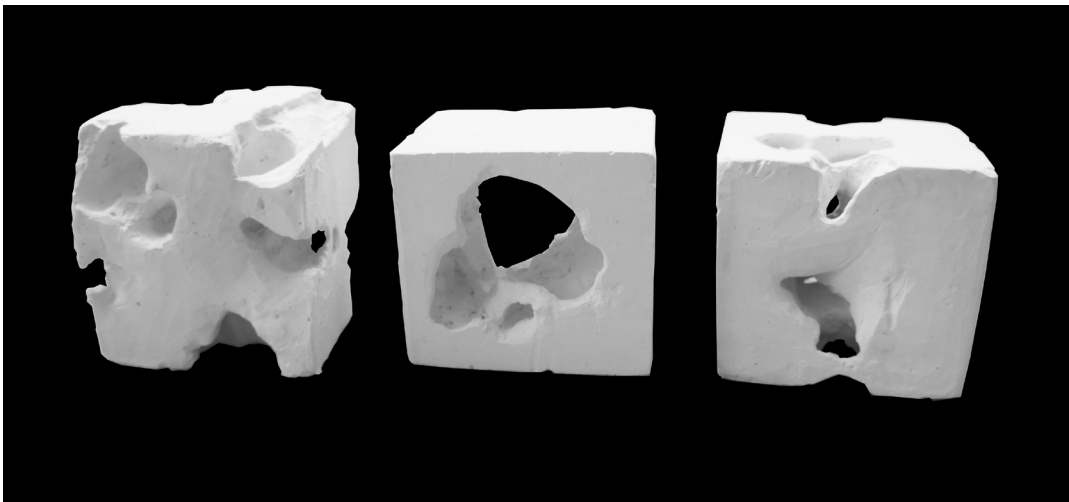
Poetry rarely describe a physical matter as divorced from meaning, but rather uses it as a springboard for readers to ponder the deeper meaning and significance of things. In comparison with conventional narrative, the language of poetry is often fragmented. However, it is partly the stylized quality of those fragmented words that allow infinite and imaginative connections to be speculated and formed. A good poem is about discovery, taking readers on an adventure of the mind and thereby altering their perceptions of the world and their existence in it (Pendleton-Julian 1996, 48). When the mind of a reader is in sync with that of the poet, as if choreographed to the rhythm of the poem itself, entirely new vistas of imagination are opened.

If poetry has a language of its own, the same is true of architecture. Architects, as poets of space and form, can virtually define the spirit of a city in their ability to find connections between disparate physical elements and to integrate them artfully into the physical environment. Architecture functions and speaks much like a poem through its various components of form, material, and methods of construction. In a very real way, the fusion of poetry and architecture has the potential to widen the public imagination, and to perhaps inspire some of them to become dreamers as well.

### **Presence and Absence**

By their very nature, contemporary cities embody the principles of presence and absence in that they contain both crowded areas and areas of apparent emptiness, of concrete substance contrasted with nothingness. In spite of the emotions of loss or nostalgia that absence tends to evoke, this emptiness also embraces a multitude of possibilities, opens for interpretation, interaction and occupancy. In this sense, absence can rise above its negative connotations and be seen as a rich source of potential instead. Absence may suggest a past that can never fully be restored, and presence is often a remnant or reflection of things in the past.

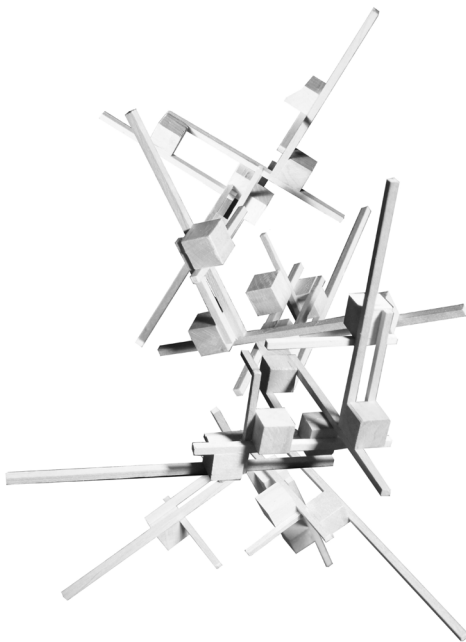
The process of remembering that which is absent or the “resurfacing” memories of the past in this way is not merely an exercise in inventory-taking. It is the act of revealing the essential elements which form the identity of a place, thereby informing and broadening our view of the present as well.



Presence and absence, solid and void

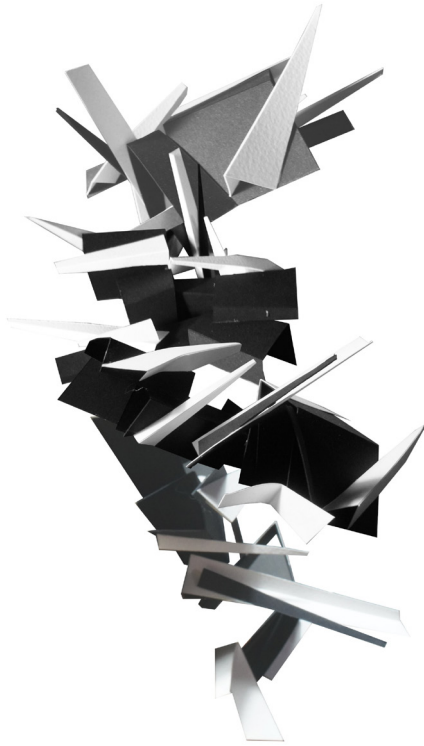
### **Mind and Matter**

"Matter is the unconscious form [...] Only matter can become charged with multiple impressions and feelings" (Bachelard 1996, 50). Mind and matter are deeply connected. According to Bachelard, each form of matter carries a distinct set of poetics as well as phenomenological characteristics. In his writing, he describes how the four natural elements – air, water, earth and fire – are highly potent stimulants of dreams and reveries. Going beyond the superficial and scientific aspects, Bachelard uses these four elements as a way to analyze the substantial characteristics of images. Similarly, in his book "Parallax", Steven Holl describes how his study of elemental matters informed and was integrated into his architectural creations. His work illustrates how the poetics of architecture can be powerfully enhanced by an awareness of natural materials.



Although physical matter is a pre-existing given, it is, we, who ultimately make that matter meaningful through our own consciousness. The true meaning of matter exist in the realm of mind. It is also the mind that connects the dynamics between matter.

Minds connecting matters



Memory and imagination intertwines

### **Memory, Perception and Imaginations**

Memory, perception and imagination can all be described as extensions of our senses in that they are fully interlocked and in constant interaction (Pallasmaa 2007, 67). All of our perceptions are influenced by or based upon memories of one kind or another (Bergson 2003, 24). Our perception of an image or object often determines the process of imagining, and connecting memories of past experience with perceptions of current reality necessarily involves a leap of imagination. An intimate connection also exists between memory and imagination, so that the two are often conflated. Not only does the imagination shape or even create memories, but the opposite is also true. As facets of our innermost identities, memory, perception and imagination are what allow us to invest our physical environment with meaning.

A city is not only experienced through the concrete form it takes, but it also captures memories, stimulates perceptions and triggers the imaginations of all who live there. The elaborated cities of Italo Calvino are imaginations constructed from memory, mirages which alternate between fantasy and the raw material of actual experience. Likewise, our minds constantly blur the boundary between what is real and what is not, between past and present, presence and absence. The poetics of a city are established by and grounded in the tension of this ambiguity.

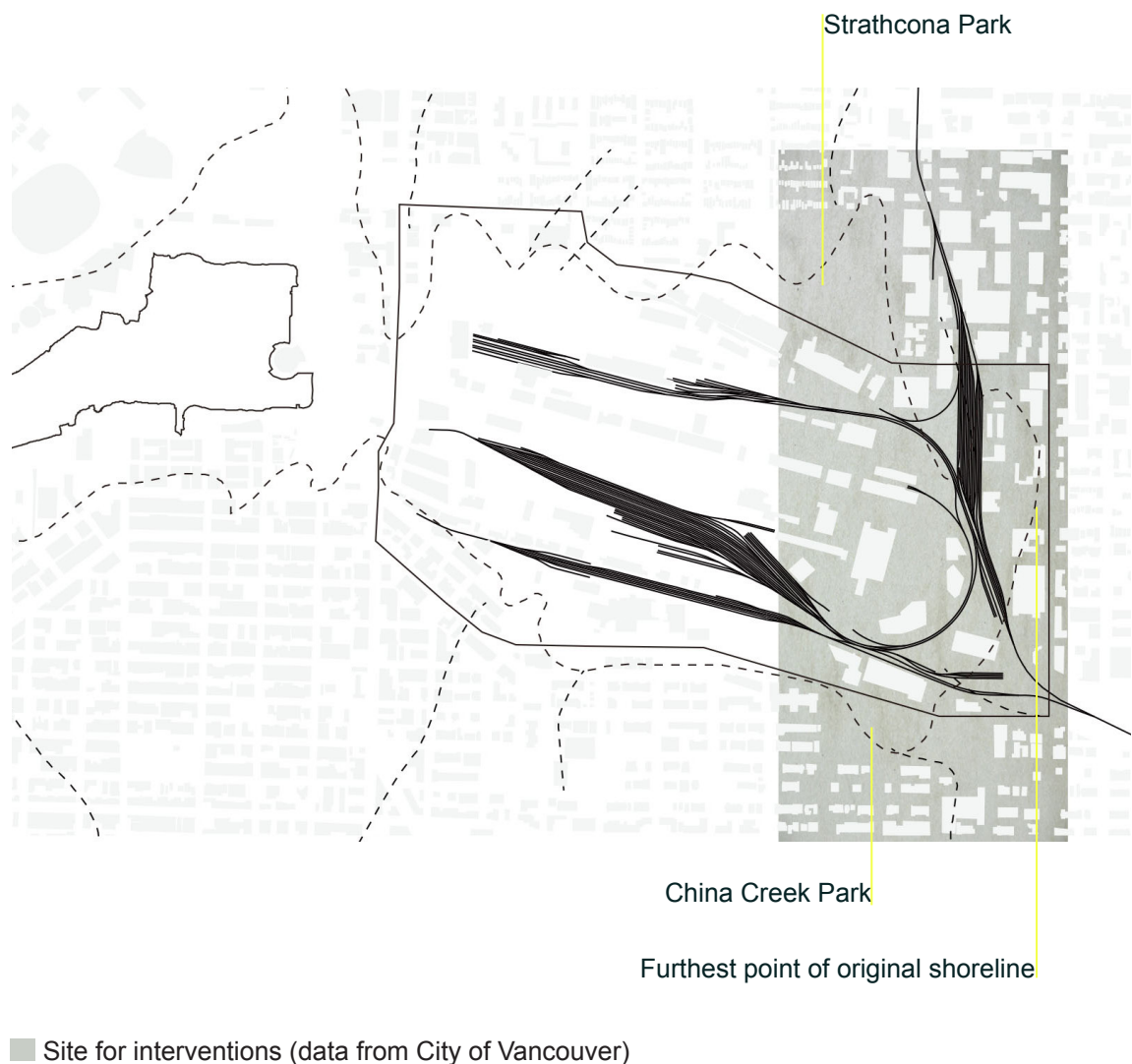
## CHAPTER 3: THE INTERVENTIONS

### Site for Interventions

The choice of the site for the proposed interventions was made on the basis of how effectively the essence of both the past and present can be extracted from the False Creek Flats site. The location chosen includes the dynamic presences and absences of the aforementioned “walls,” and also embodies many historically representative background stories.

The geographical scope of the area is defined by three features: China Creek Park to the south, Strathcona Park to the north, and the original shoreline as it would have existed at high-tide prior to landfill being added. Both parks were the site of estuaries and where the creeks connected into the flats. Strathcona Park used to be named “hobo-jungle”, a place where destitute workers gathered and lived during the Depression years, and World War II would see it transformed into a military training camp. The largest tidal estuary ran through what is now China Creek Park, where a number of Chinese immigrants tended vegetable gardens and raised livestock such as pigs near the mouth of the creek. The physical evidence of these overlapping forms of land usage remains embedded in the ground of the parks, further reflecting the historically complex and multi-layered nature of the site.

The model on next page is a visual interpretation of the time-space structure of the site as defined by the “walls.” It depicts how each “wall” is both figuratively and literally grounded in a specific layer of time, and how each constitutes a significant line of demarcation across the site. Their differences in height and material in the model correspond to the different roles they play in the physical space and also reflect their relative significance in the minds of Vancouver’s inhabitants, in the perceptual realm, both historically and in the present day.



Great Northern Railway

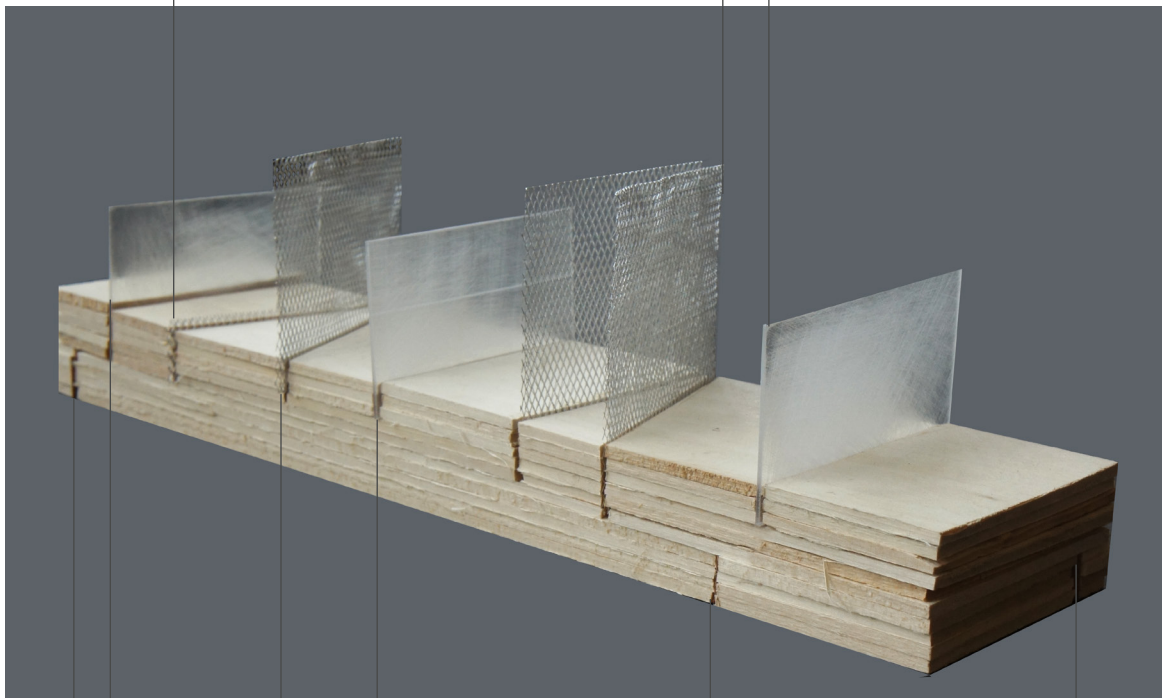
**1913**  
the Great Northern railway was extended through the flats to service the city's growing industry and population.

**1962**  
The station of Great Northern Railway was demolished

Canadian Pacific Railway

**1872**  
Canadian Pacific Railway came and Vancouver was as found an adjunct to the arrival of the railway

Psychogeographical boundary



Psychogeographical boundary

Arterial street

Original shoreline

Original shoreline

The Canadian Northern Railway

**1915**  
The Canadian Northern Railway completed to its railline

**1975**  
Its station came the only point of arrival and departure for train passengers in Vancouver

China Creek

**1872**  
Early Chinese settlers raised pigs along the banks of China creek, at the mouth of China Creek, C.C. Maddams began growing fruit and berries for city wholesalers

“Walls” and the histories they signify (data from City of Vancouver and The Challenge Series)

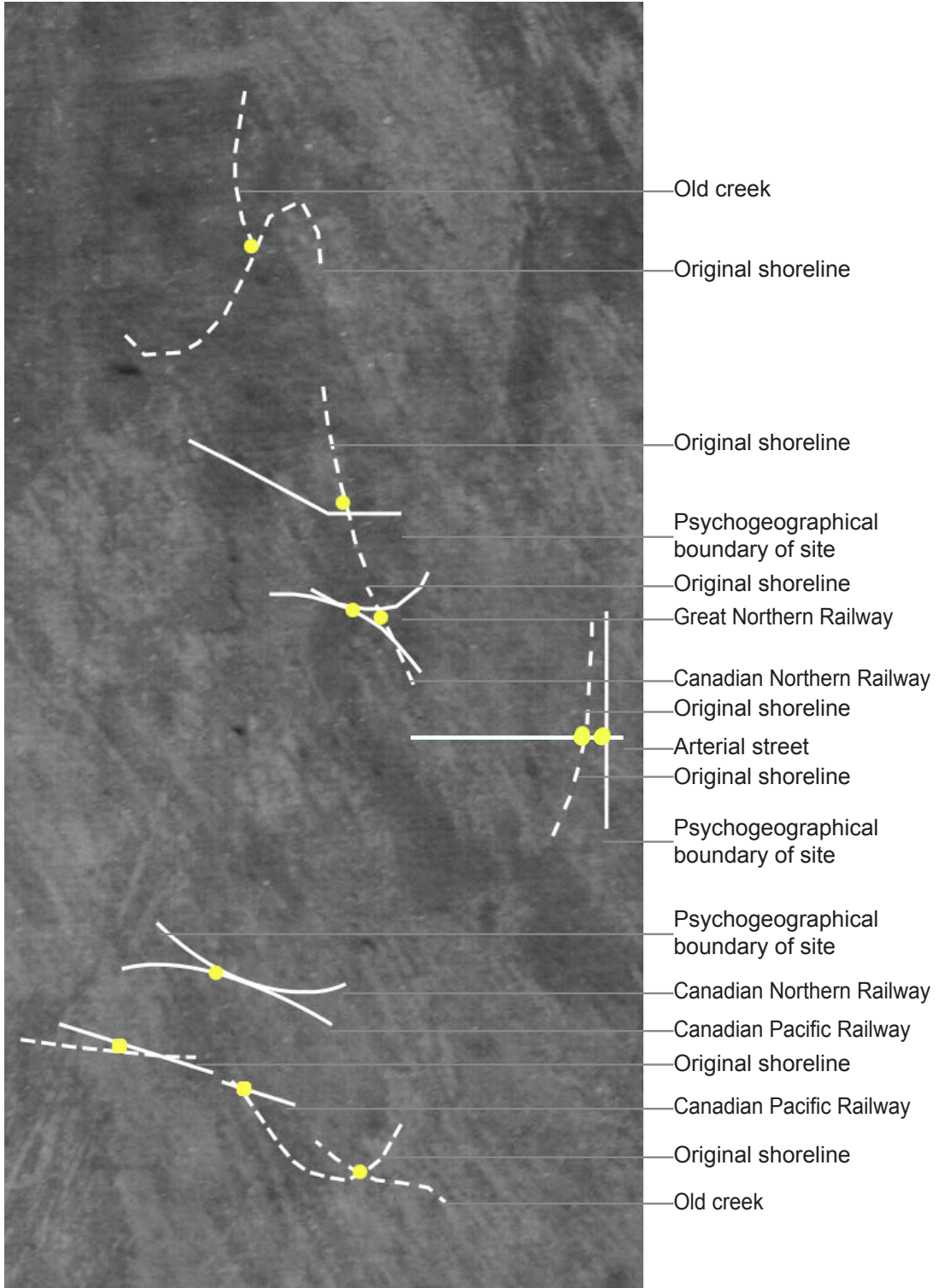
### **The Follies**

This intervention consists of 10 “follies” which are to be situated at different locations across the site where the present “walls” intersect with those which are absent. The concepts of presence and absence which are inherent in the site are incorporated into the follies through their architectural design and use of space.

The six basic elements of nature and settlement – air, water, fire, earth, sky and ground – inform the design of these follies. Each one tells a different story, expressing not only the individual characteristics of these elements, but also the ways in which they interact.

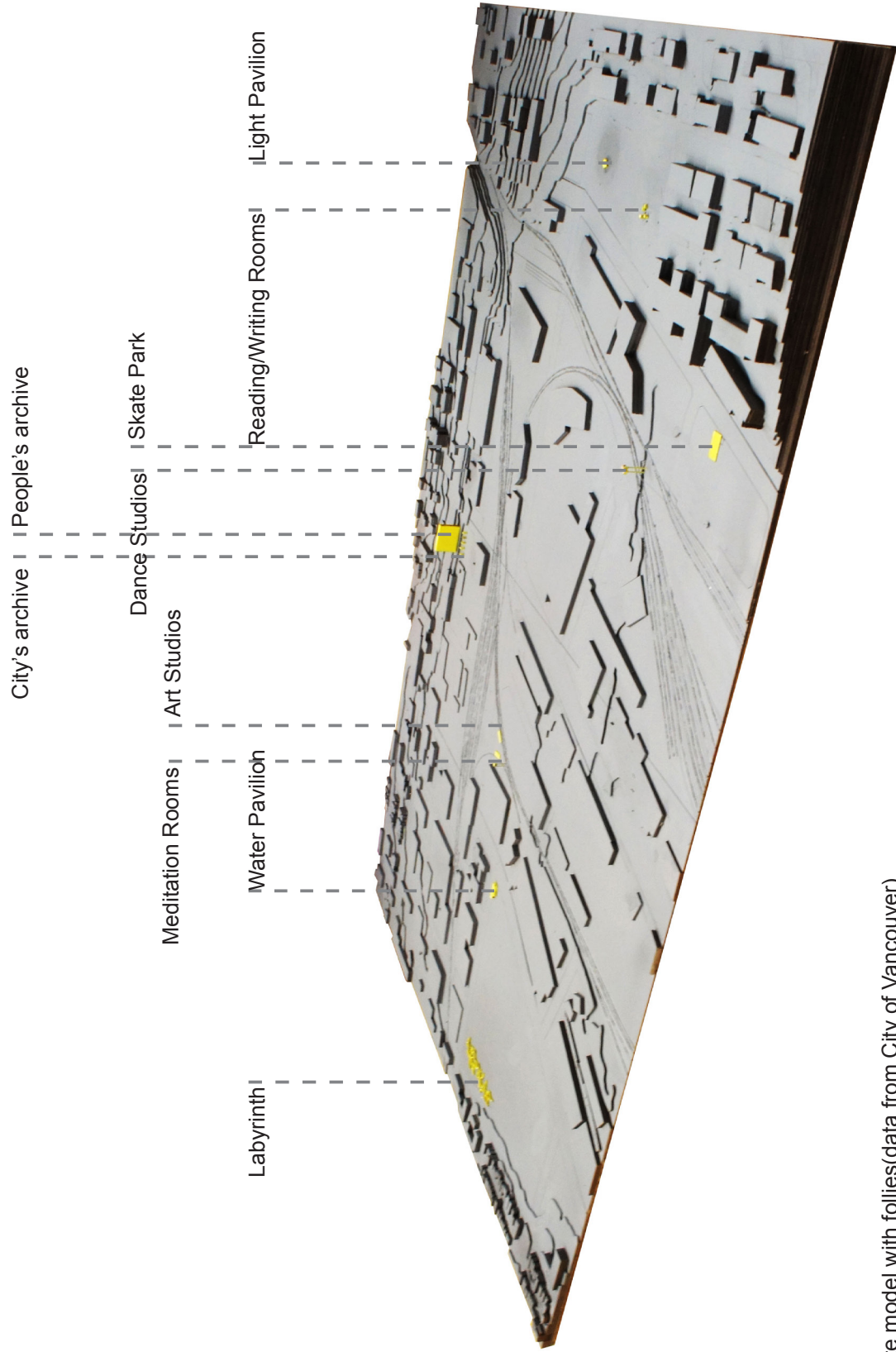
The program of each folly stems from a careful examination of the site in order to take into account the various attributes of their locations as well as the nature of the elements to be expressed. The programs of intervention are as follows: labyrinth, rain pavilion, light pavilion, reading/writing Room, dance studio, skate park, meditation room, art studio, archive of city, and archive of people.





- Follies
- Present Walls
- - Absent Walls

Follies and the “walls”



Site model with follies (data from City of Vancouver)

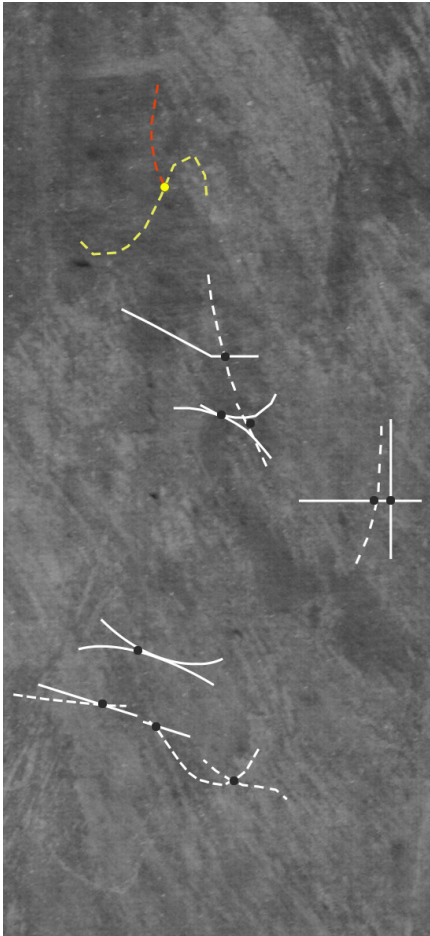
### **Fire, Water, Air, Earth**

As mentioned previously, the four natural elements of water, fire, air and earth are considered highly potent materials in their capacity to inspire imaginations and reveries (Bachelard 1983, 3). Gaston Bachelard introduces these four elements as matters that embody creative temperament as well as the basic forms of life (Bachelard 1983, 5). His revealing and inspiring investigation of the elements set up a conceptual framework for the first four follies.

The first four follies – labyrinth, water pavilion, air pavilion and reading/writing rooms are all situated along the original shoreline of the flats. Each one is infused with the characteristics of one of these four elements of poetic inspiration, and each expresses something about the relationship those elements have with the now-absent water.



Water, Fire, Air, Earth  
by David April (April, 2009)



Location of labyrinth

### Labyrinth: Fire and Water

The labyrinth is a space which expresses the essence of fire and water, and it marks the location where a large stream once flowed into the flats. Two different types of industrial panels are used in its construction, and their welding is symbolic of the warmth of fire. In this sense, fire is warmth, life, and permanent connection. Fire is also suggestive of extreme change, of a radical time acceleration in which everything is brought to its final conclusion (Bachelard 1968, 16). A secret path through the labyrinth was included to imply fire's symbolic resonance with the passage of time in this way.

The interaction between water and fire is about "marriage and struggle" (Bachelard 1983, 96). Although they are natural counterparts, they are not mere opposites. Both are symbolic sources of life and death, of creation and destruction. It could be argued that they are abstractions of the same material in different forms, in that they seem to share a common essence.



Relationship with the "walls"



Studies on the conflicting nature of water and fire

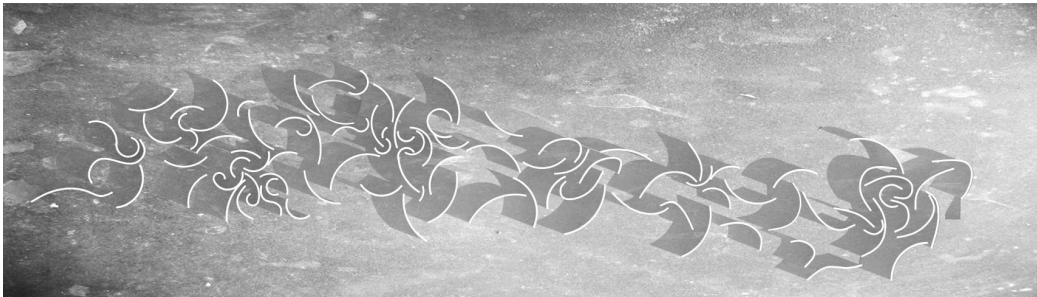
Fire is represented here by Corten panels, a weathering steel which rusts in contact with water, and reflective steel panels are used to represent the shimmering, mirror-like qualities of water. Both are firmly rooted in the ground, all the way down to the original waterline of the flats. This gesture is intended to create the impression that the panels are actively reaching down to touch to the past, to physically embrace the realm of imagination and absence.



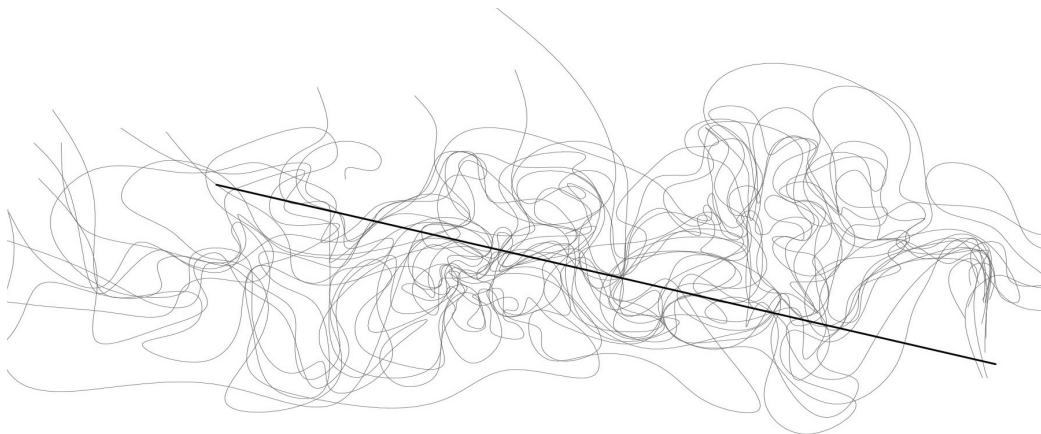
Visualization of the marriage and struggle between water and fire



When it rains, the channels and grooves of each panel become filled with water in a way that is reminiscent of the presence of tidal water rising across the flats. The amount of rust which develops on the fire panels will depend upon this contact with water in a real, physical sense. Accordingly, the passing of time itself will be engraved into the rusting of the fire panels. Here, fire marries and struggles with water in various forms: the rain, the abstraction of water as represented by the steel panels, the historical water of the tidal flats themselves. In this way, through exploring the phenomenon of fire, the past, present and future of False Creek Flats can be seen to converge in one physical space.

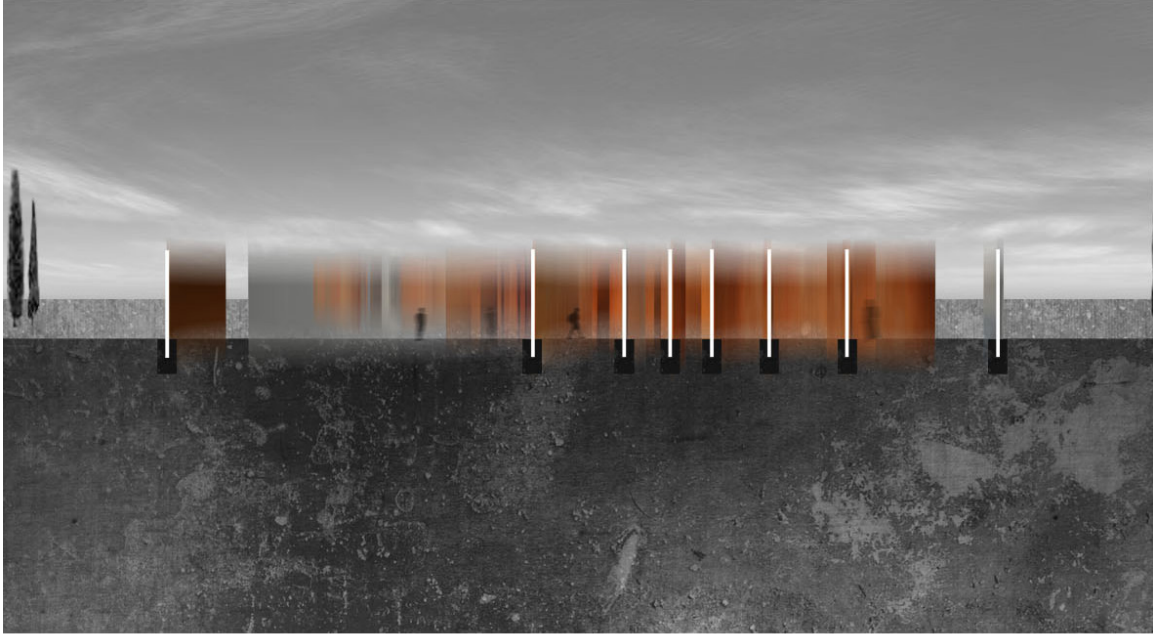


Top view of labyrinth

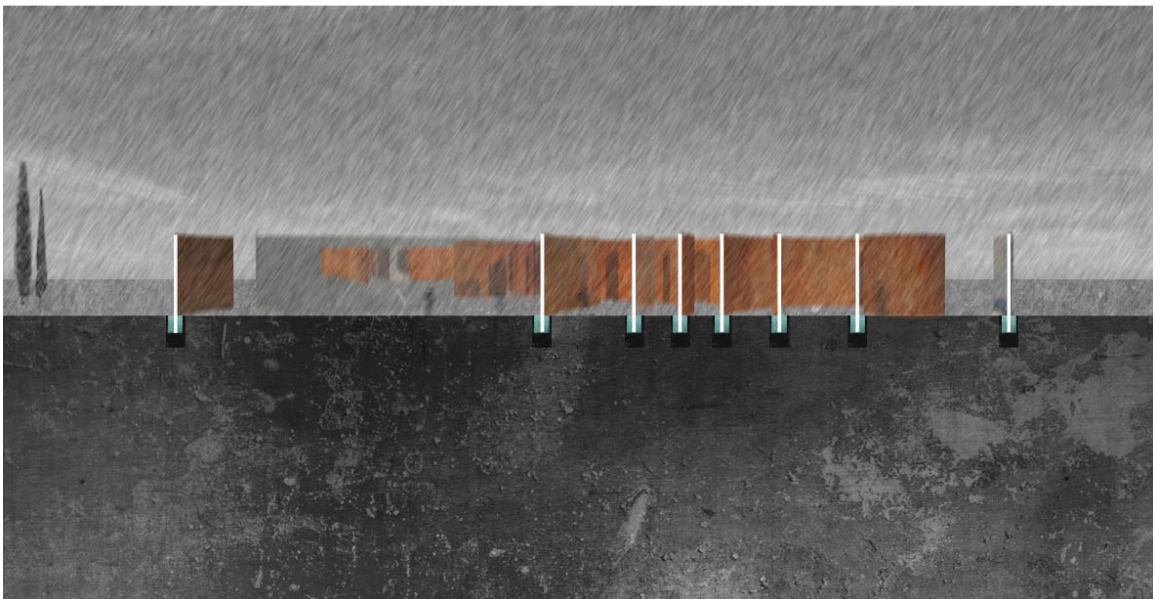


Lines of circulations and the "hidden path" through labyrinth

The labyrinth is a place of exploration where both the body and the mind can become lost in time as well as space. It is an isolated space, and being such means that the memories it contains and holds will be specific to the Labyrinth itself. Its only point of contact with the outside world is through the medium of water. Water functions as an eye on the world, watching the sky, the city, and the inhabitants themselves with an almost supernatural degree of clarity. It reflects as literally as does a mirror, but there is something dream-like about it as well. By allowing ourselves to become lost in space and time, we do not merely enter the Labyrinth in a physical sense; we travel into realm of dreams.

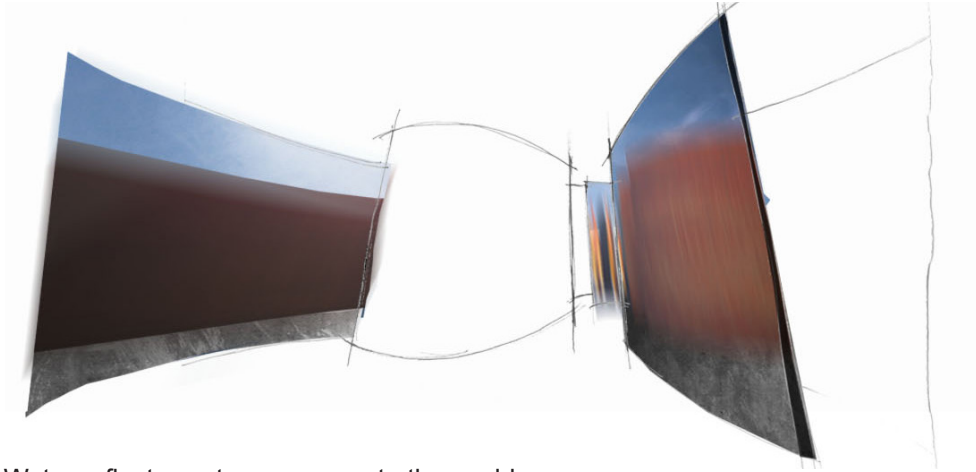


Labyrinth connects the sky and ground, people get lost in time and space

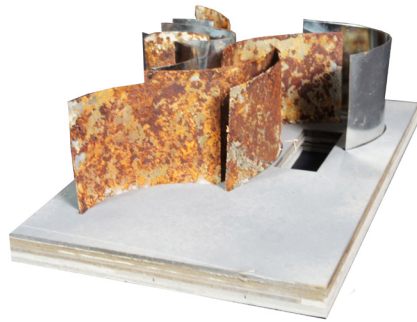


Labyrinth in the rain, connecting the present to the past

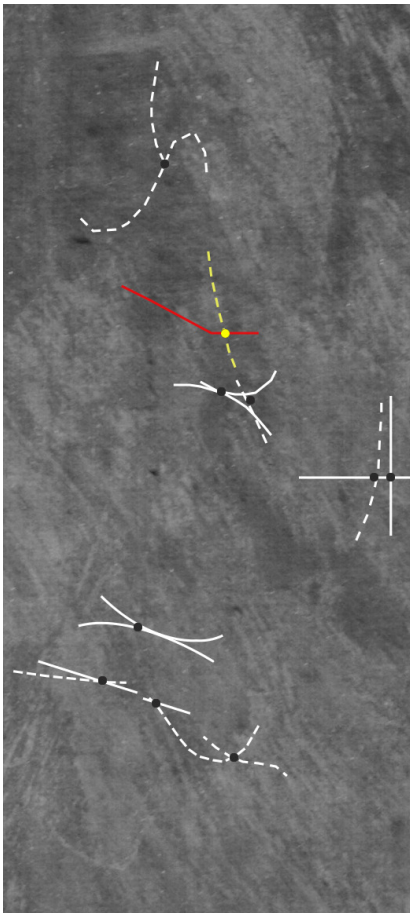
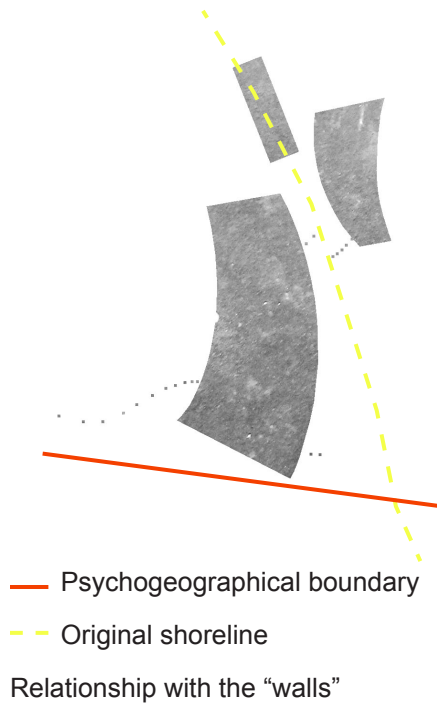




Water reflects, water as an eye to the world



Form and material of the labyrinth



Location of rain pavilion

### Rain Pavilion: Water and Water

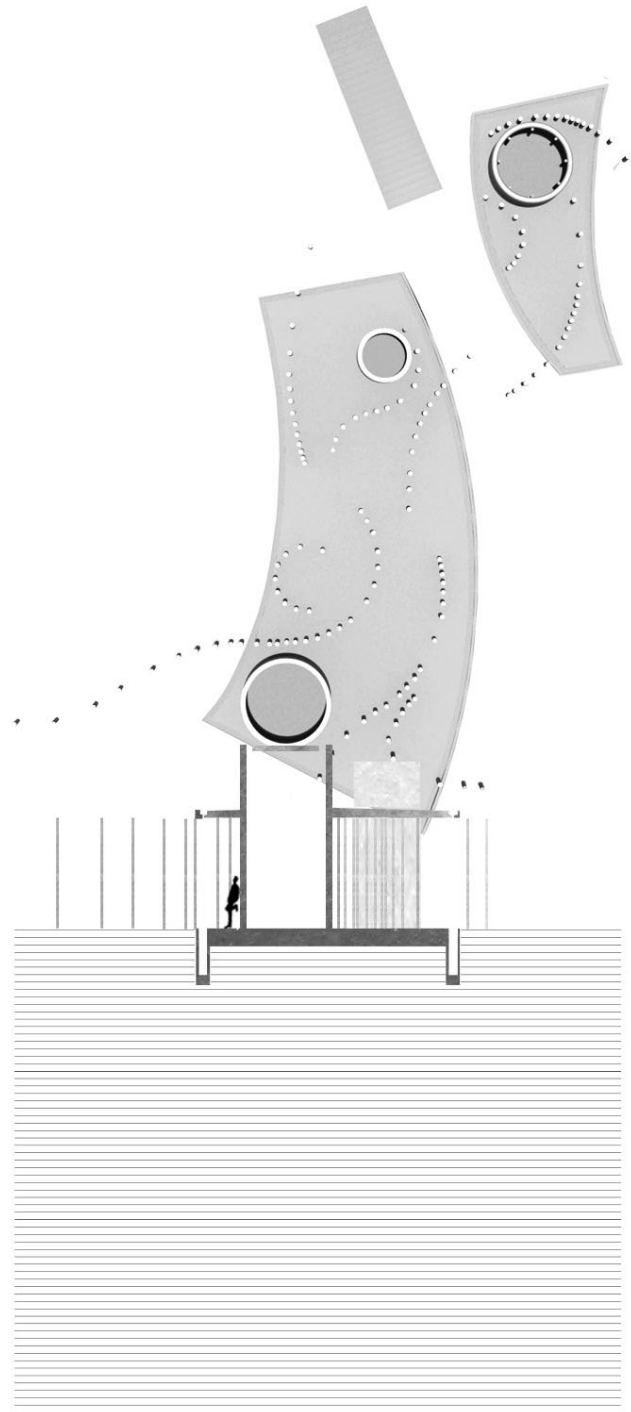
These two small pavilions are separated by the figurative “wall” of the original shoreline, prompting visitors to consider the absent past even as they interact visually with the water’s edge as it exists today, in the far distance.

In both pavilions, curved columns mimic the movement and rhythm of flowing water in both shape and density, creating a palpable sense of motion flowing swiftly through space in spite of the stillness and solidity of their construction. Many of these columns open outward from the space within, blurring the boundary between inside and outside. In the absence of rain, such a space might be interpreted as indoors or outdoors, or both at the same time, or neither.

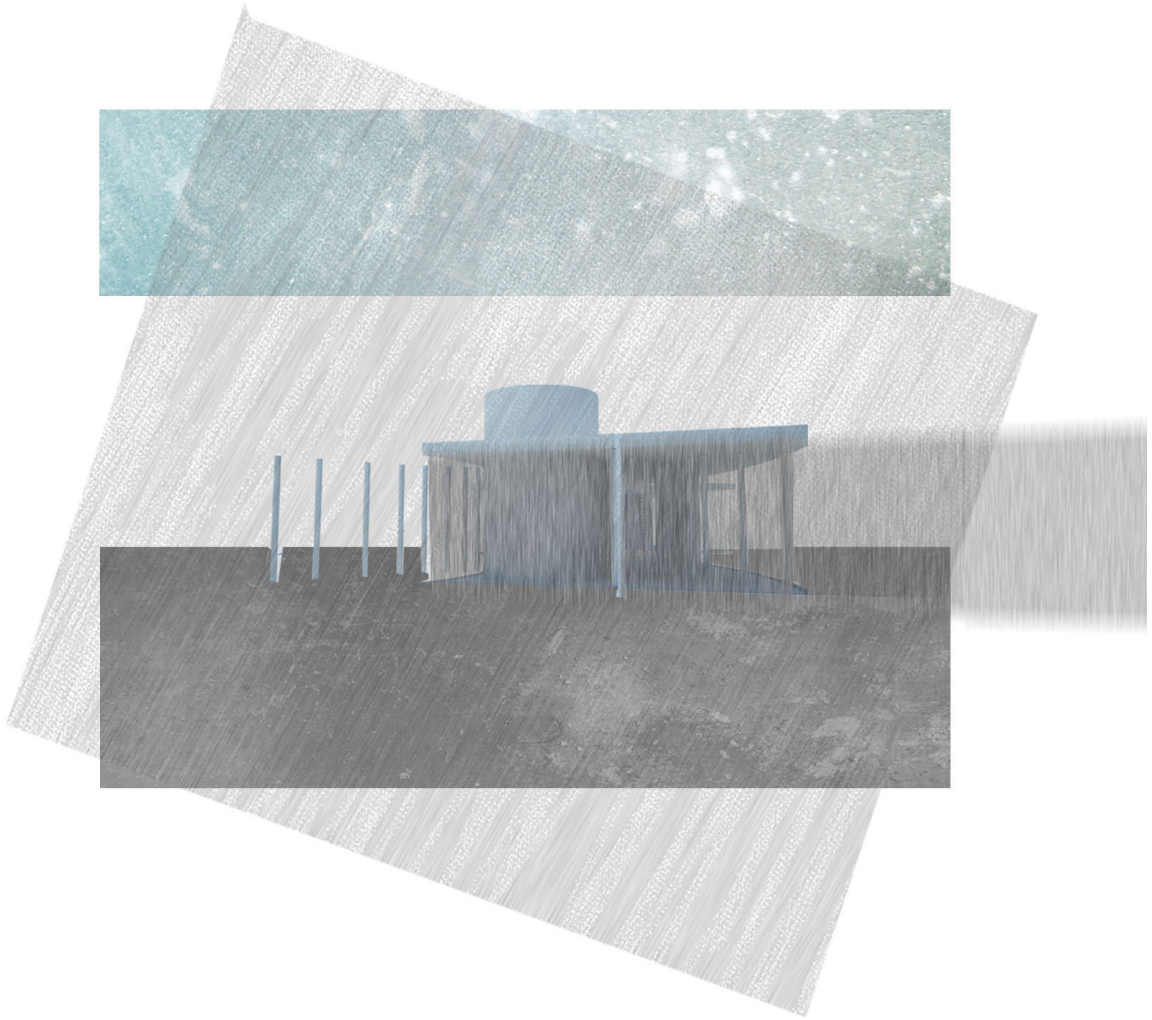
When it rains, rain water is collected along the edge of the roof and forms a continuous wall of water, enclosing the interior space of the pavilion. The rainwater is thereby transformed into a material that connects the sky and ground in addition to defining the space of the pavilion. Water channels at the ground level are also suggestive of their function as receptacles of water, thereby evoking the imaginative or figurative presence of water even it is not raining at that particular moment.



Abstract studies of water



Plan and section of water pavilion



Water connecting the sky and the ground

Three “sound towers” are incorporated into the water pavilion, and each is infused with a distinctly different acoustic element: the sound of water dripping; the sound of water flowing through channels; and the “sound of silence,” or rather the absence of any sound at all. When it is raining, these spaces are filled with different layers and qualities of sound. Their soothing, natural rhythm surrounds the visitors, creating a richly intense auditory experience. Silence comes to the fore in times of no rain, providing a contemplative atmosphere.

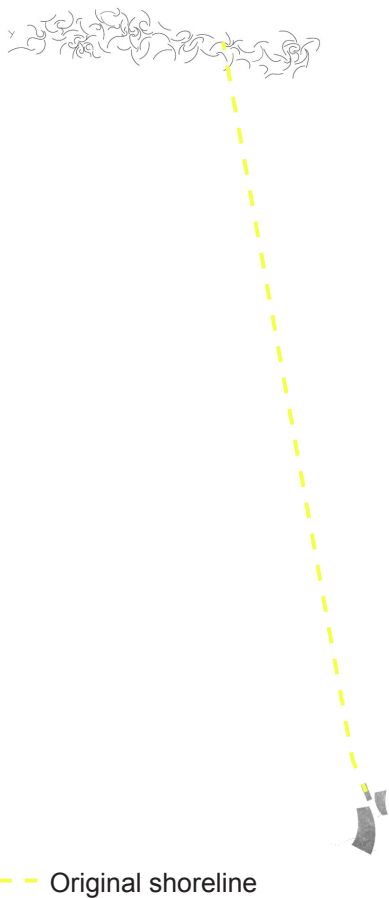
In this way, visitors may come to more deeply appreciate the complexity of our relationship with water, how it affects us in such a wide variety of ways, and how we can – through skillful manipulation – cause it to serve purposes of our own.



Sound and rhythm

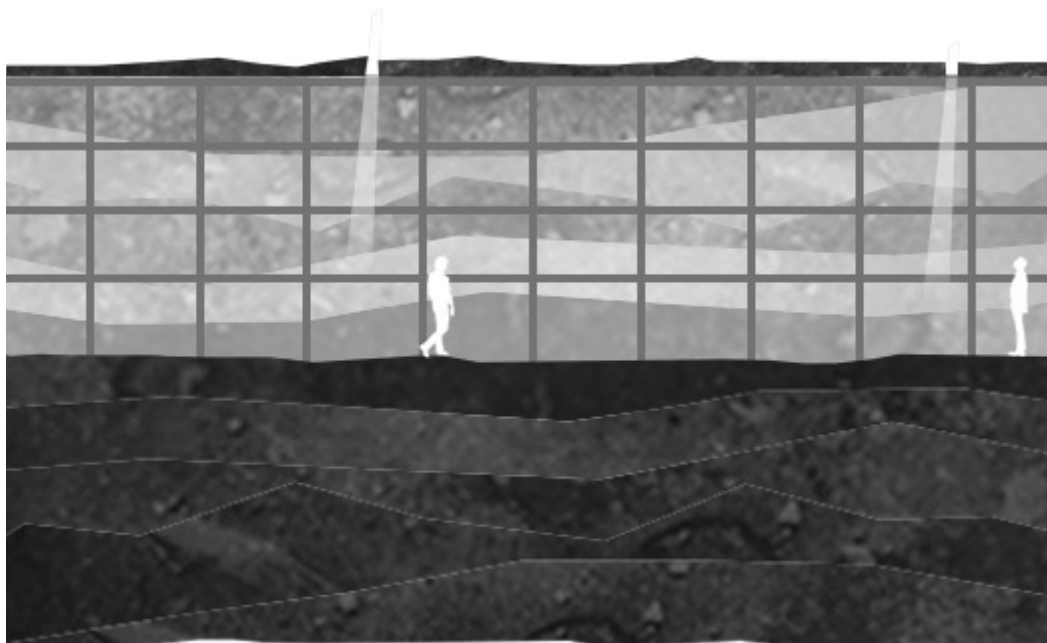
### The Path

The water pavilion is connected to the labyrinth by a tunnel which follows the contours of the original shoreline. The presence of this tunnel draws attention, by the fact of its very existence, to the current absence of tidal waters. It is a space for exploring the notion of time illustrated by the exposed layers of the ground which form the walls – literally, in this case – of the tunnel. These sedimentary layers of earth and landfill, in addition to representing time's passage, also provide an example of the extreme transformational nature of human settlement. The ground itself has become a physical archive in which the history of the site is embedded.



— — Original shoreline

The path connecting labyrinth and water pavilion

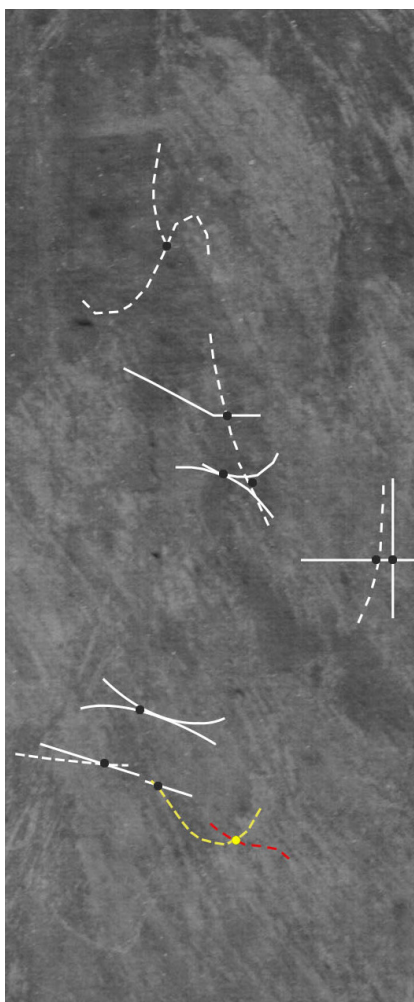
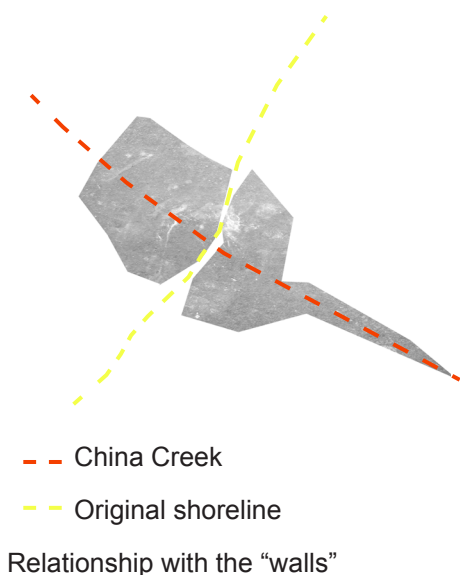


Layers of ground along subterranean path



### Light Pavilion: Earth and Water

The Light Pavilion is located at the exact spot where China Creek once flowed into the False Creek Flats. The creek bed has been transformed into a path which leads to the entrance of the pavilion. The former edge of the tidal flats is suggested by a light score in the ceiling, which is the only opening for natural light to enter the space. The sliver of light which is thus produced moves slowly around the interior as the sun rises and falls. Its appearance is ephemeral and constantly changing in much the same way that the water here once flowed and changed under the influence of gravity, tides, and the ever-present wind.

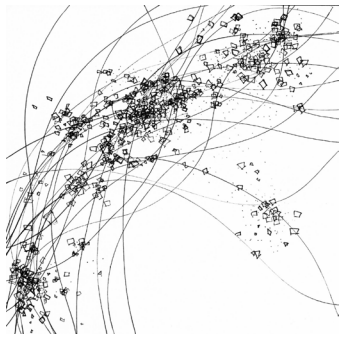


Location of light pavilion

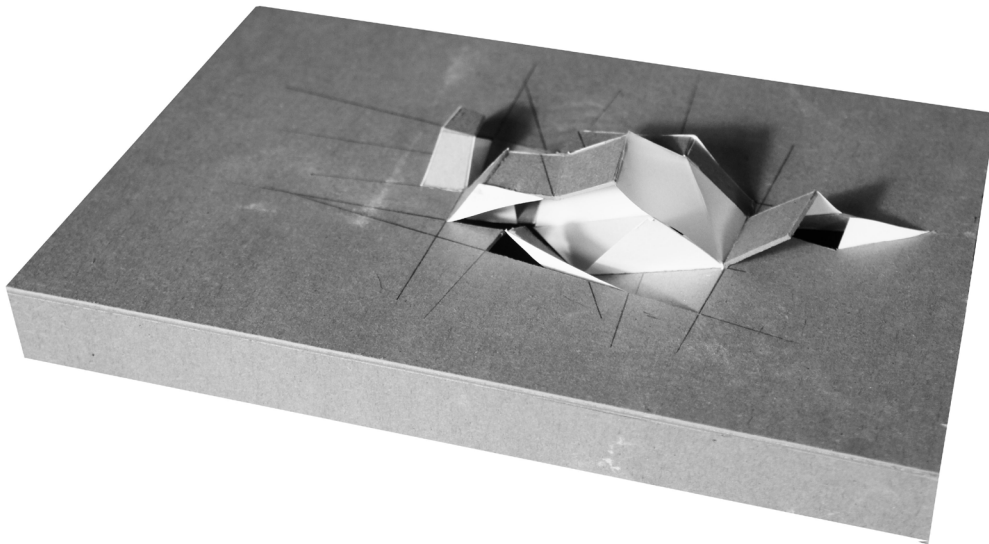
Over time, the surface of the ground records the movement of the water passing over or through it. Likewise, the undulating surface of the ground which forms the floor of the pavilion implies not only the movement of water, but the way in which it once carved and sculpted the surface of the flats.

The relationship between water and the ground level of the historic past is illustrated both literally and metaphorically in this space. When the sculpted ground receives the play of light over its texture, the present and the past are "stirred together" into one moment. Through interactions between the ground, the shadows, and the sliver of light that falls from the ceiling, time itself can be translated into a new experiential dimension of existence in space.

The marriage of water and earth can be seen as akin to the process of kneading. “When we have succeeded in making water truly penetrate into the very substance of earth reduced to powder, when flour has drunk up the water and when water has eaten up the flour, the experience, the long dream of ‘binding’ begins” (Bachelard 1983, 95). Water softens earth, and earth strengthens water. In places where water is dominant, the earth is dissolved. Conversely, where earth dominates water, the water is absorbed, evaporates, or is drained away. Concrete is therefore the natural choice of material for this pavilion. Not only does it firmly establish the power and robustness of the space, but it also suggests a perfect marriage of water and earth in the sense that a precisely accurate mixture of water and concrete is required for its production.

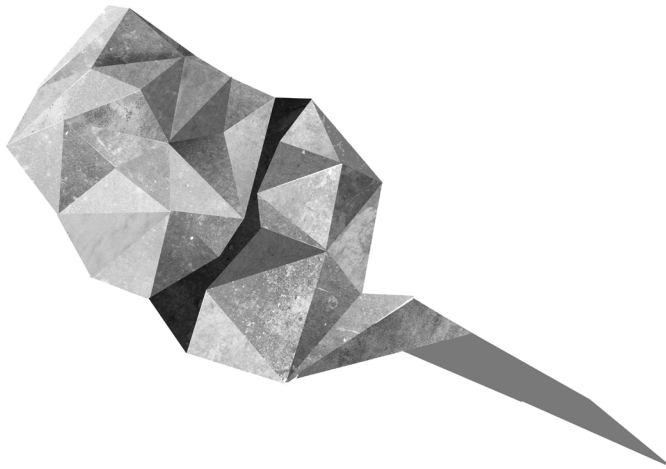


Water and earth

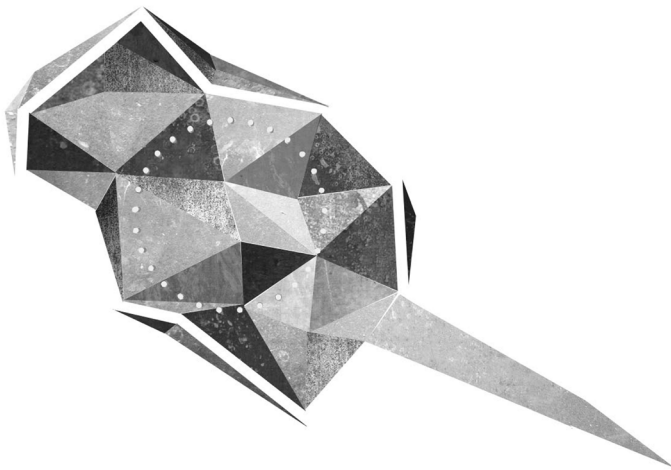


Abstract study of water and earth: water “sculpting” and “carving” earth

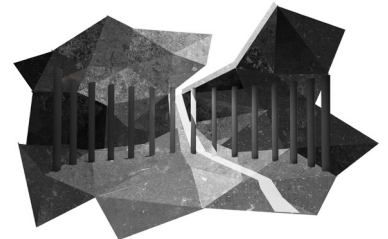




Light Pavilion top view



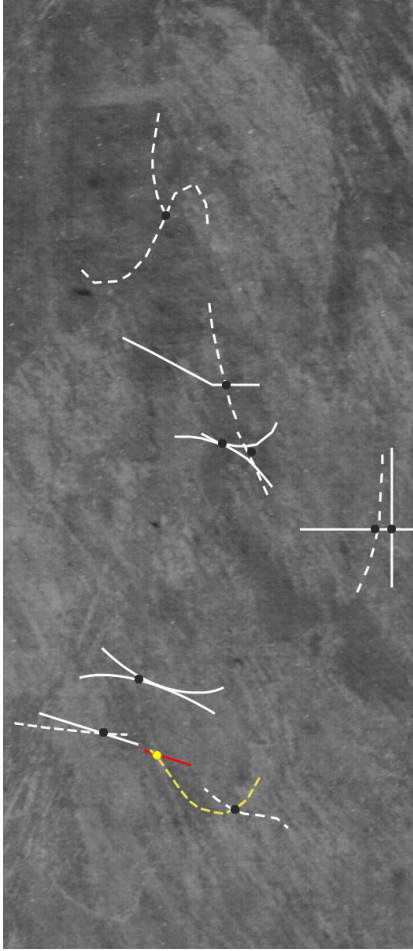
Light Pavilion plan



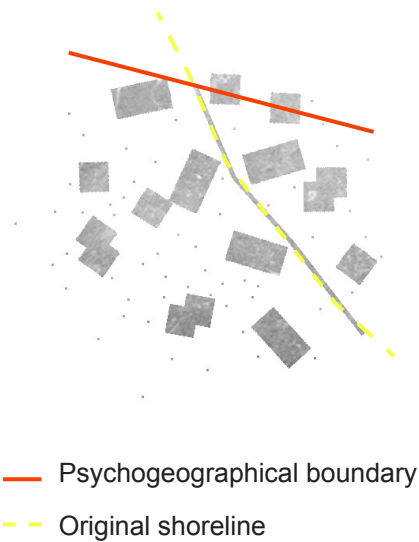
Shadow movement



Light Pavilion Section



Location of reading/writing rooms



— Psychogeographical boundary

- - Original shoreline

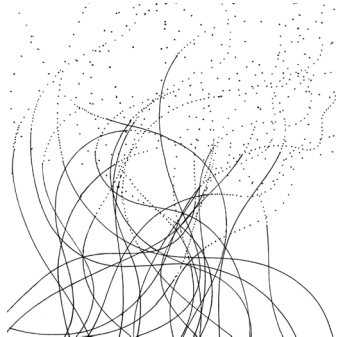
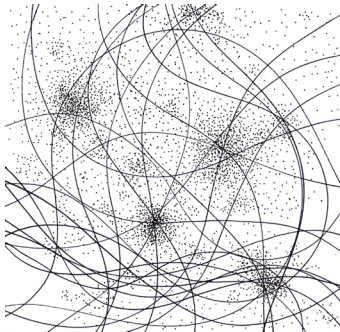
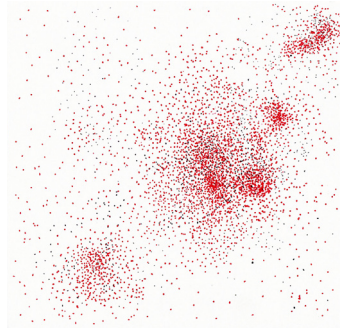
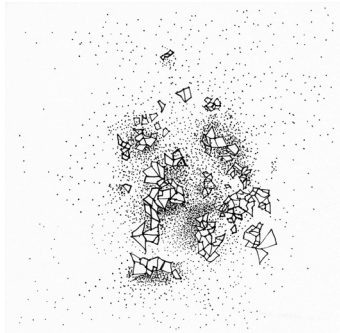
Relationship with the “walls”

### Reading/Writing Rooms: Water and Air

The reading/writing rooms are located at the intersection of the former shoreline and the present boundary of False Creek Flats. The original contour of the shoreline is delineated by a shallow rill which runs along the ground between the rooms, so that the absence of the historical water is represented by the presence of actual water. In keeping with the theme of the structure – the relationship between water and air – the rill is fed only by rainwater. In this way, the ground below is sharply contrasted with the element of water from above which must travel through the air to reach its destination. Air-borne water is necessary for the activation of this feature.

The program of the reading/writing rooms stems from those characteristics of water and air that suggest different aspects of reading and writing. Water flows in a way that resembles language, and sometimes has a measurable beginning and an end, like a river which forms inland and gradually makes its way to the sea (Bachelard 1983, 186). Air flows like a dream in which the beginning is often unknown and the end is rarely predictable.

The movement of water is grounded and visible, but air seems to rely on nothing at all; it is free, invisible, and as mysterious as the world of imagination and reverie. Water has edges, but the air around us has none. It is as if water is busy writing and speaking while air spends the whole day dreaming. In this space inspired by water and air, visitors are encouraged to read with the easy fluidity of moving water, and to dream along with the ephemeral flow of the air itself.



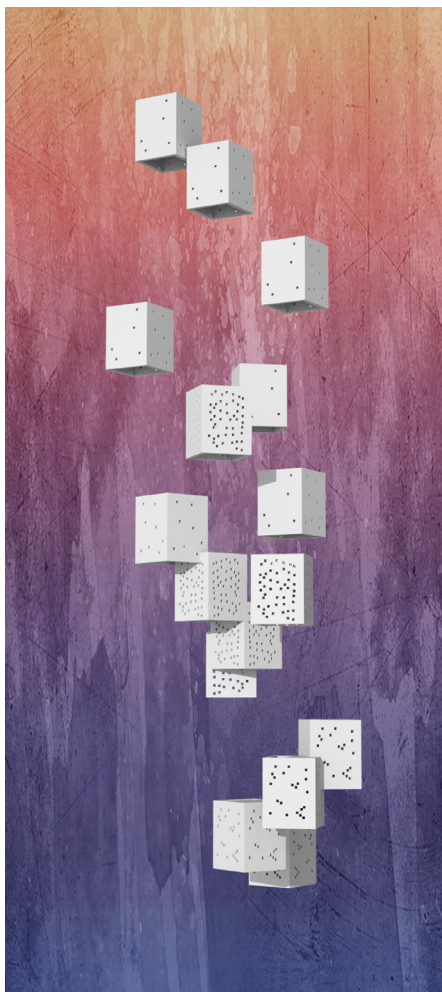
Water and air



Movement of air

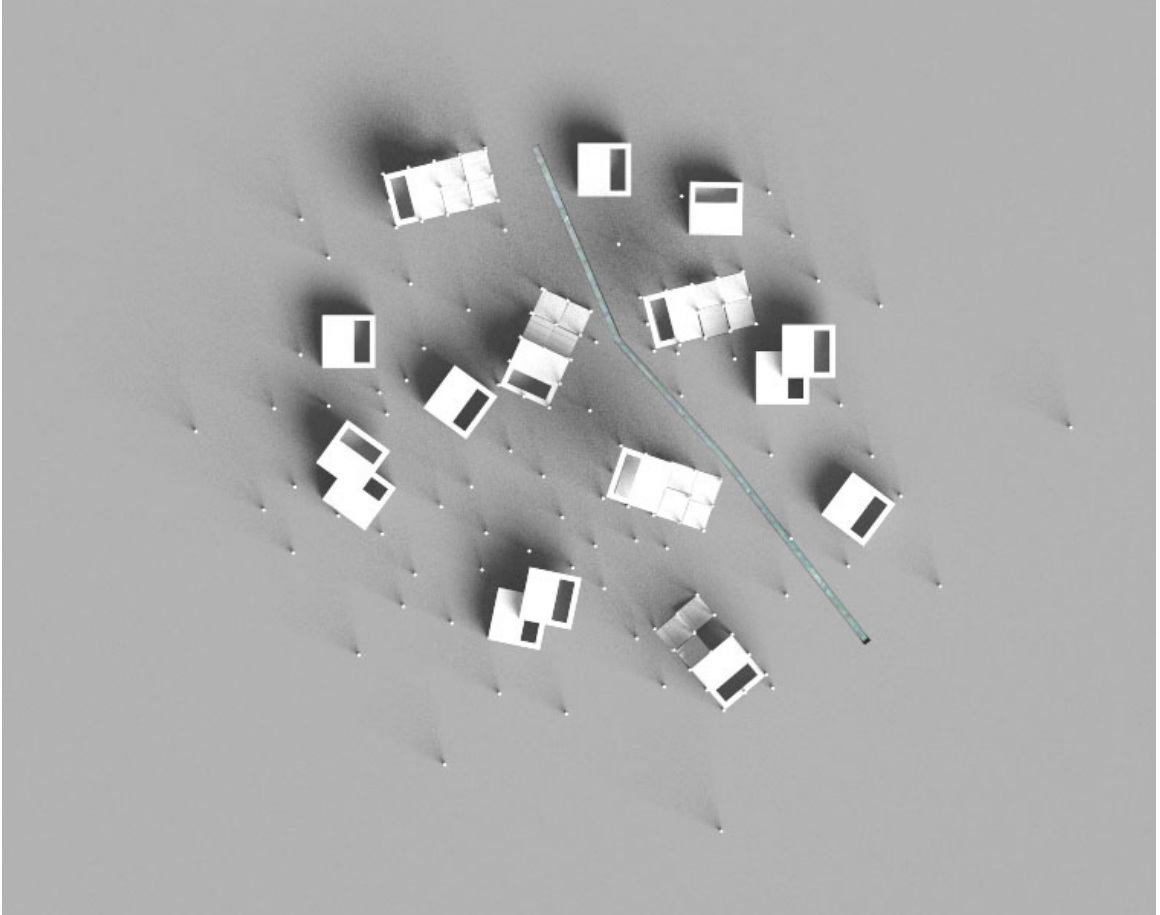


The structure of the reading/writing rooms implies a deeply intertwined relationship between water and air. Water can exist in three different states – solid, liquid, or gas – depending on the temperature. The relationship between those states can be seen in how ice floats on water, or how steam rises above a boiling pot. In this space, those relationships are visually explored by using glass panes of different thickness in the windows of different levels, symbolically representing the structure of water molecules as they exist in different states. The absence of water is suggested through representation of this phenomenon.

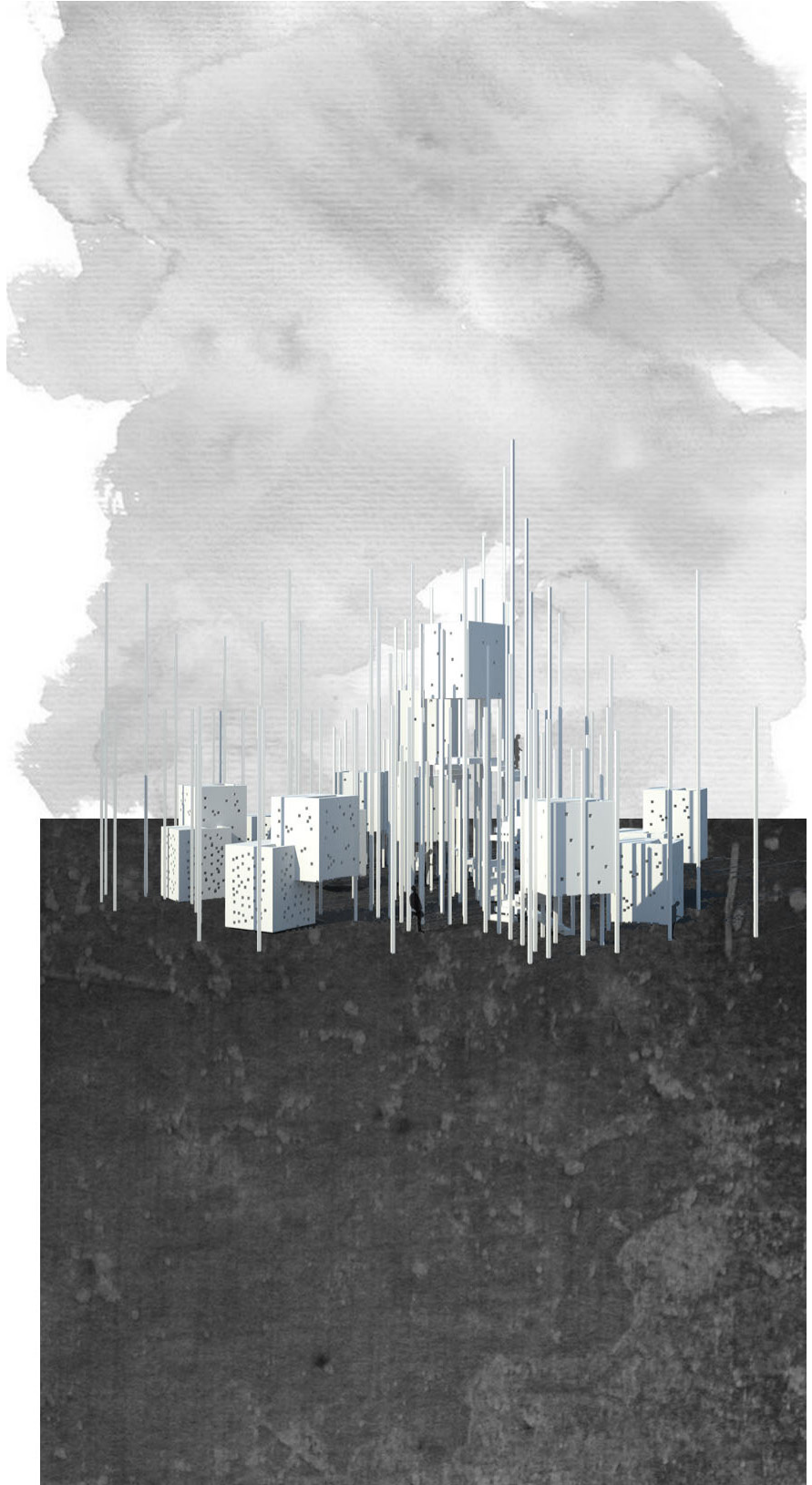


Three stages of water in different temperatures

Although the water on the flats would have been affected by the air around it – rippling as the wind blew upon it, for example – it was still grounded. Water can only rise into the air in its gaseous form through the process of evaporation, and only then does it become free of the ground itself, joining and flowing with the air. The subtle character of this relationship is infused into the space of the reading/writing Rooms, creating an impression that formerly grounded elements are in the process of rising, move up through the air and into the sky.



Reading/writing room top view



Water rises from the ground, reaches the air, lingers and flows into the sky



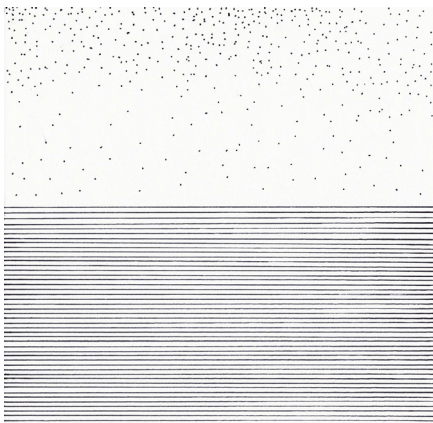
Through these abstract representations of the interaction between water and air, visitors to the reading/writing rooms are encouraged to consider the world over their heads, to uplift their thoughts, and to let their dreams rise free as the air itself into the sky above



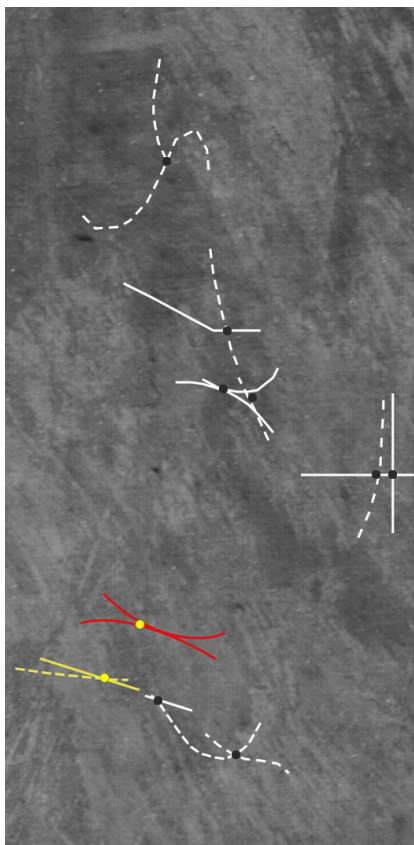
### Sky and Ground

Gaston Bachelard writes that the relationship between the ground and the sky is related to the way poets dream: “Common sense lives on the ground floor, always ready to engage in ‘foreign commerce’ on the same level as the others, as the passers-by, who are never dreamers. To go upstairs in the word house is to withdraw step by step; while to go down to the cellar is to dream, it is losing oneself in the distant corridors of an obscure etymology, looking for treasures that cannot be found in words. To mount and descend in the words themselves—this is a poet’s life. To mount too high or descend too low is allowed in the case of poets, who bring earth and sky together” (Bachelard 1994, 147).

The twin hemispheres of ground and sky define the world we live in, and the space between these two is the dwelling place of mind and body. The physical, metaphorical and spiritual presence of the sky above and the ground below is crystallized in the concept of the next four follies: the skate park, the dance studios, the meditation room and the art studio.



Ground is layered, sky is formless.



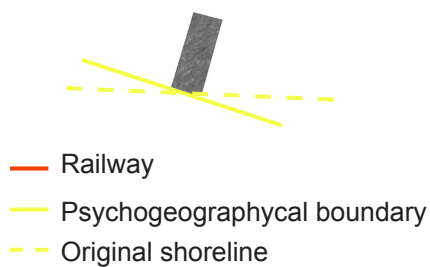
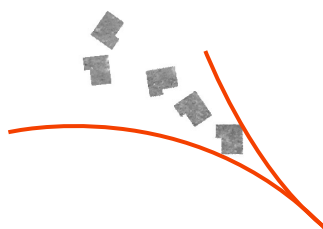
Location of dance studios and skate park

## Dance Studios and Skate Park:

### Ground and Body

The skate park is located along the original shoreline, suggesting the ephemeral and transitory nature of water, and the perimeter of the Dance Studios are defined by the current boundary of the site. This intersection of old and new joins together the present condition and past history of the site into a unified spatial moment. The Dance Studios are also situated between two railway tracks, forming a monument which harkens back to their original construction in the early 20th Century.

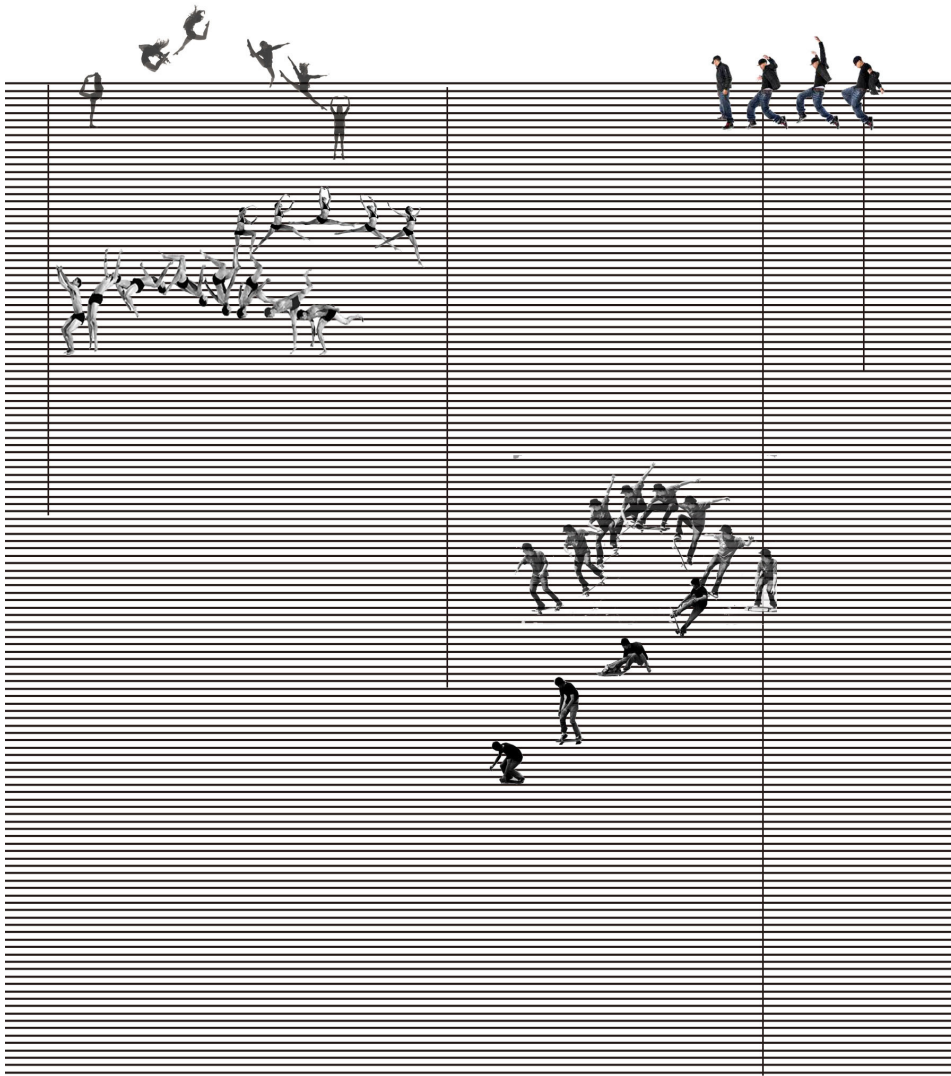
The dance studios and skate park seek to explore how physical movement of the body through space relates to different ground levels. Layers of newly designed surfaces have been constructed under, on, and above the ground. In this way, visitors are encouraged to become more aware of their connection to the ground, and how the quality of that connection affects physical movement.



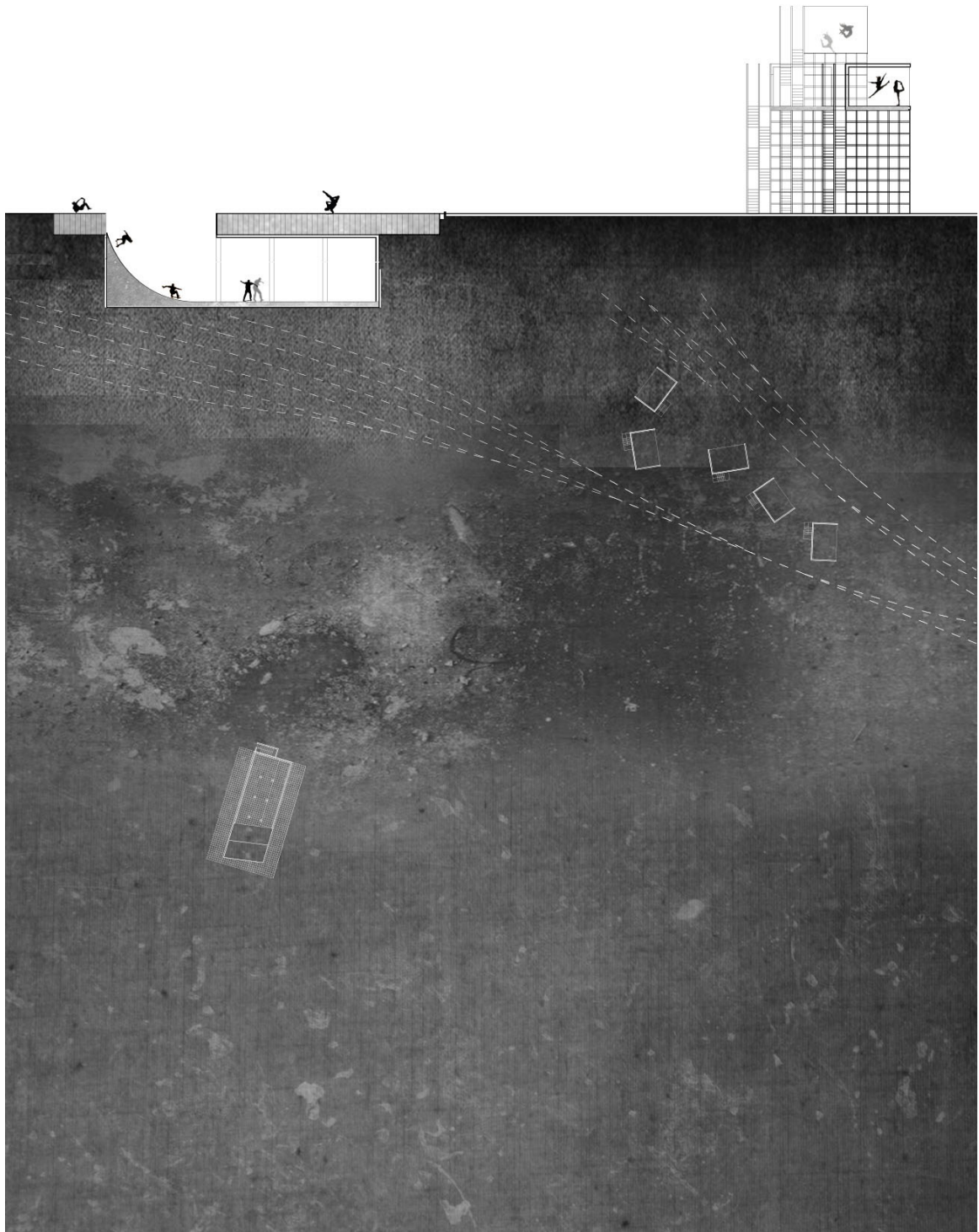
- Railway
- Psychogeographical boundary
- - - Original shoreline

Relationship with the “walls”

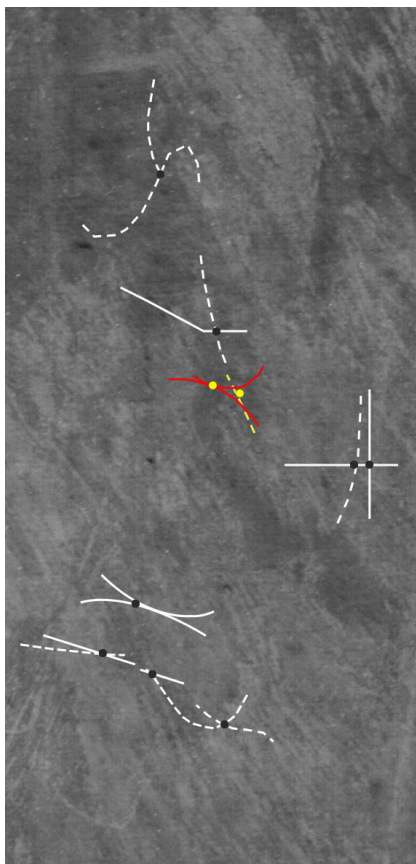
Using different techniques and equipment, dancers and skaters jump into the air, turning and stretching, sometimes even reaching skyward. They always return to the ground, however, and the ground always receives them. Since the human body is naturally connected to the ground by gravity, it shapes and guides us just as we shape and guide it. As environments established for the sole purpose of physically moving within them, the Dance Studio and Skate Park are eloquent examples of both.



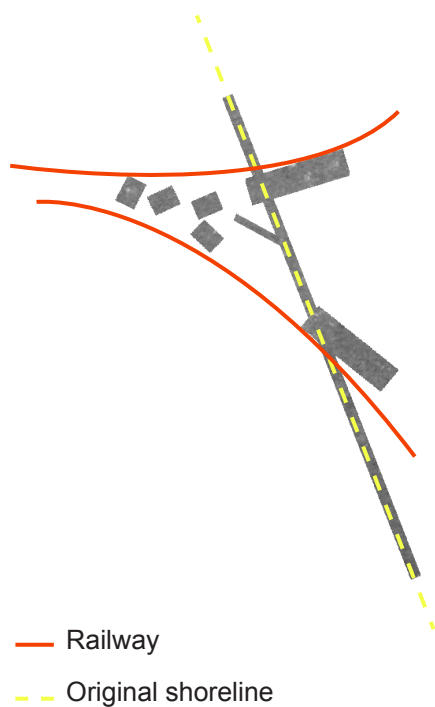
Movement across different layers of ground



Skate park and dance studios plan and cross-section



Location of meditation towers and art studio



— Railway

- - Original shoreline

Relationship with the “walls”

### Meditation Towers and Art studio: Mind and Sky

Like the Dance Studio, the Meditation Tower is situated between the two railway lines, one of which is still actively used for passenger transportation. The other line is now defunct and overgrown, rendering it effectively absent. A path connecting two separate Art Studios runs along the edge of the former shoreline. Even though these structures embody to some extent the grounded nature of the “walls” upon which they rest, they are actually designed to stimulate a deeper connection between mind and sky.

The historical construction of Vancouver, as that of any city, changed the shape of the land completely. Practically everything about it has been physically altered over time, and almost nothing remains untouched. Only the sky remains as infinite and formless as it ever was. However, from within the spaces of the Meditation Tower and Art Studios, our vision of the ground – of the city itself - is blocked. All we can see is the sky.

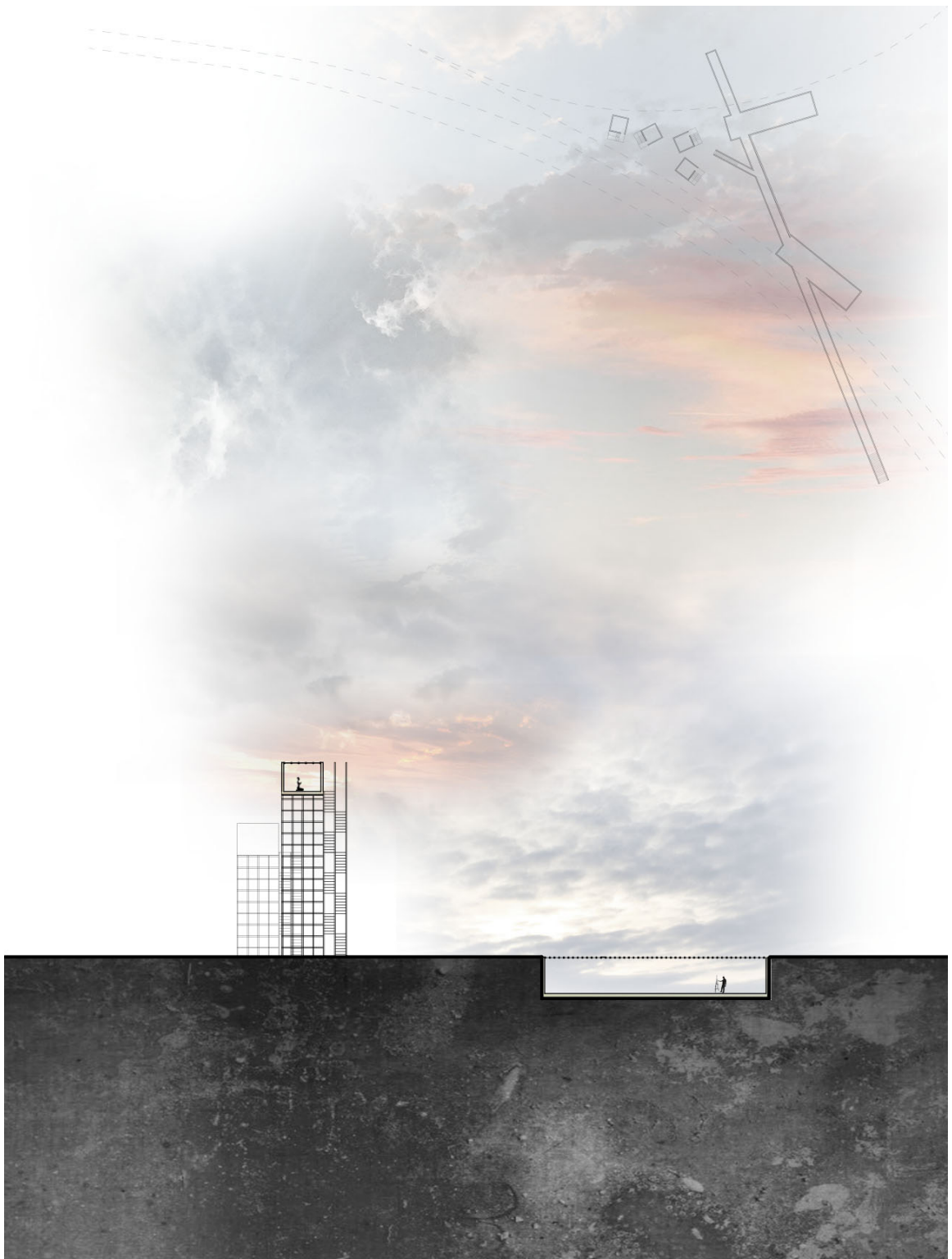
Here, we are intimate with the sky. We focus on the qualities of its motion and spirit as it changes from bright to dark, blue to gray, clear to cloudy. We see the passage of time in the sun traveling overhead. Here, our minds can begin to blend with the sky, and all of our dreams and memories are free to rise up and become one with it.

In the meditation tower and art studios, the sky is a metaphor for the mind. They are spaces for people to dream in.



Minds rising into the sky





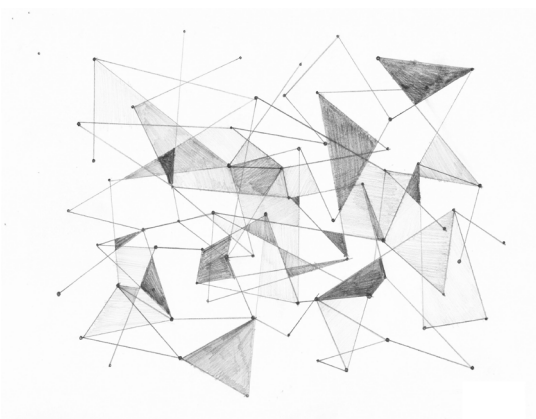
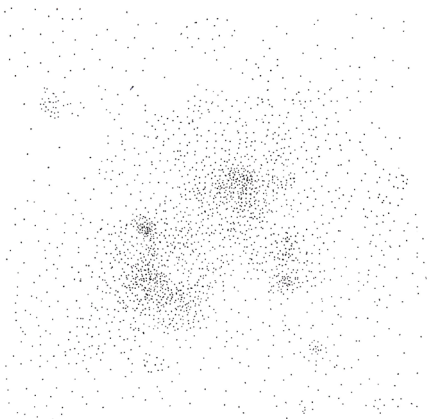
Meditation rooms and art studios plan and section



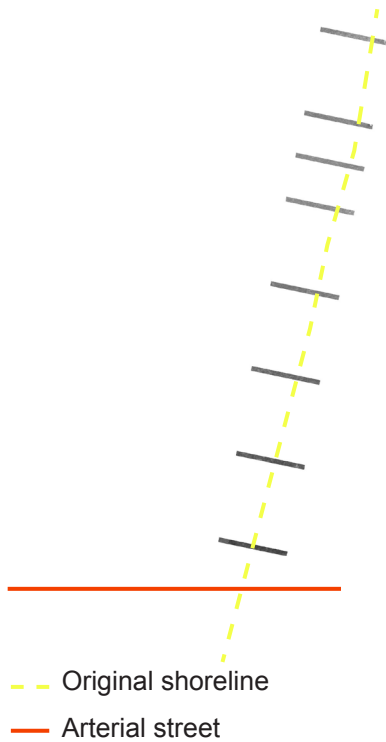
### City and People

"The city exists in the memory, in the desire to remember, in the desire to forget, in the simultaneous construction and memory and forgetfulness" (Bunschoten 2001, 22). The city itself is an archive of the collective and individual memories of its inhabitants. Likewise, the inhabitants themselves are archives of the city in which they dwell.

False Creeks Flats raises some important questions about how history and memory should be stored in the context of a city such as Vancouver and its inhabitants. Keeping in mind the idea of "archiving" as an organizing principle, the archive of city and archive of people have been designed to house inventories of both material and immaterial memories within experiential spaces. In addition to this, it is hoped that the effect of these spaces on visitors may be to trigger new memories and leaps of imagination.



Abstract studies of city and people



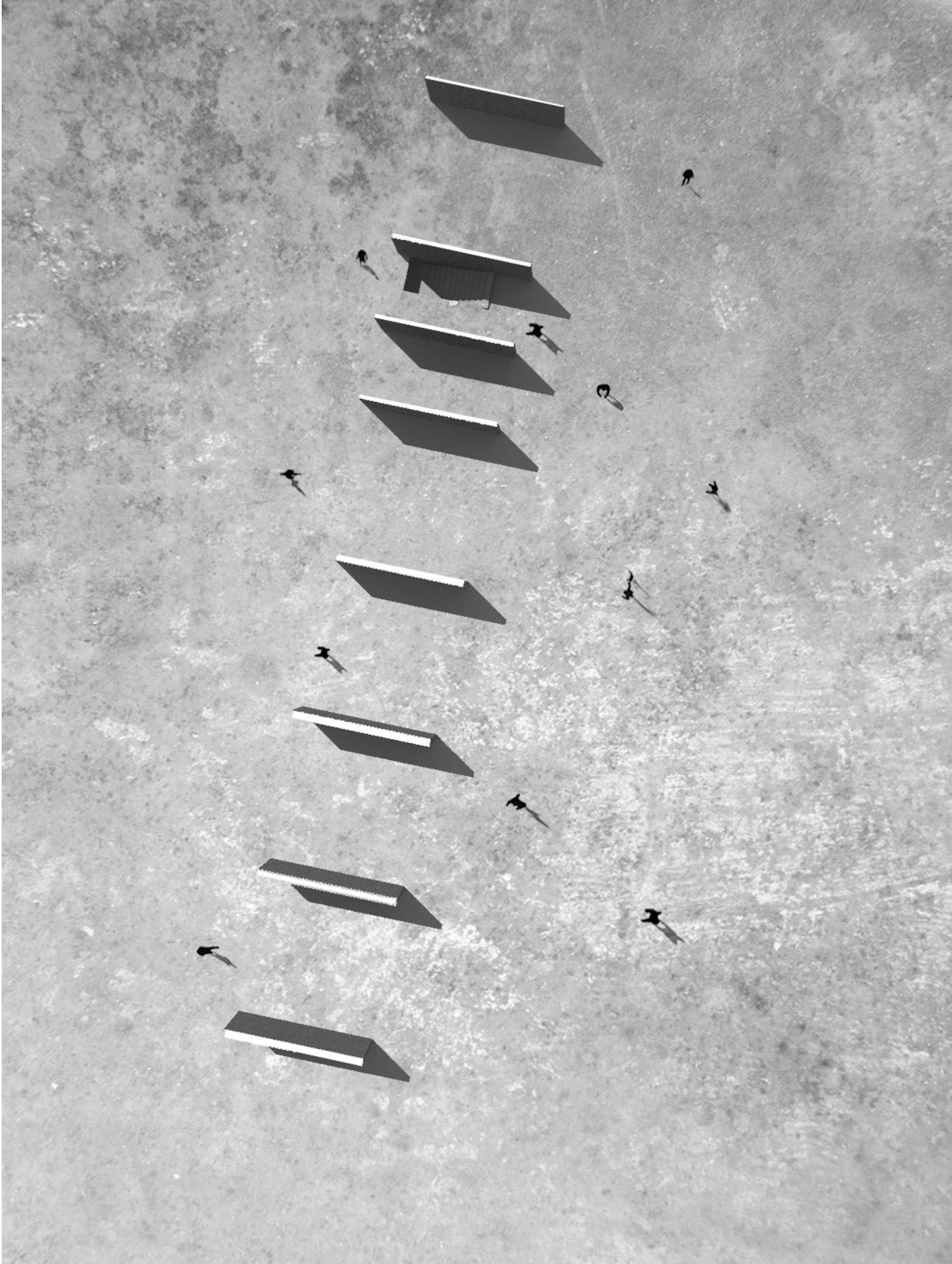
Relationship with the “walls”



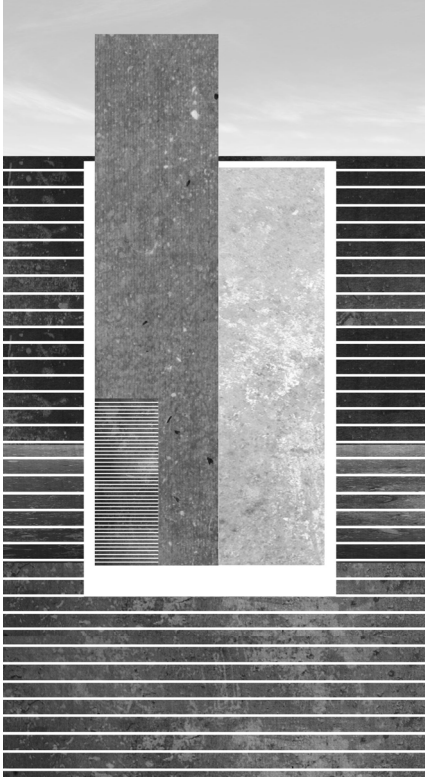
Location of archive of city

### Archive of City

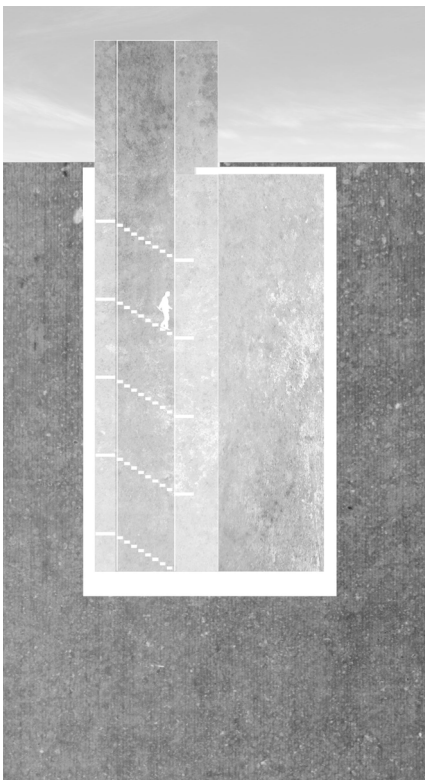
Archive of City is situated at the furthest inland point, along the shore, at which point the tidal flats at one time had extended. Several “walls” trace the former shoreline and structure the “container” for the memories which lie hidden under the ground. On the surface, these walls form a small landscape in their own right, and also serve as a monument to remind visitors of the tidal waters which once flowed here in the past. The design of the archive is based primarily on the former existence of that shoreline, emphasizing the role water has played historically in the development of Vancouver, and also exploring the relationship between nature and human settlement.



Walls marking the old water edge



Ground as layered memory



Ground as the container

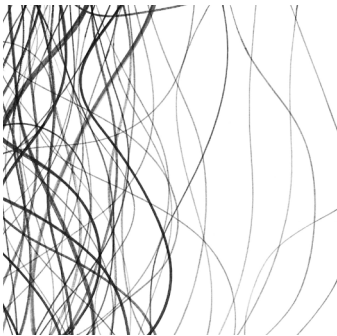
In Walter Benjamin's writings, he maintains that "memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but rather a medium. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This confers the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter, to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil" (Benjamin 1932, 596). This figurative representation of memory as the layers "strata" that accumulate over time leads directly to the design concept of the archive.

All of the official documents of city development – memories of the city, in other words – are stored underground as a figurative illustration of how the past is embedded in the earth. The ground, which consists of multiple layers of earth, functions as the vault or container of the city's layered memories. In this context, uncovering the memories buried there is literally a process of excavating the past, digging downward to find traces of history that have been buried under more recent memories. Traveling to the bottom of the archive is a journey into the distant past, all the way back to the very foundations of human settlement in this area.

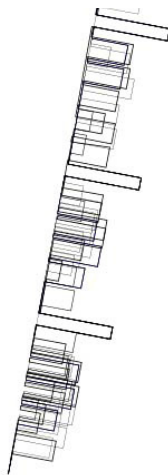




Drawers becomes stairs, people are traveling in layers of time

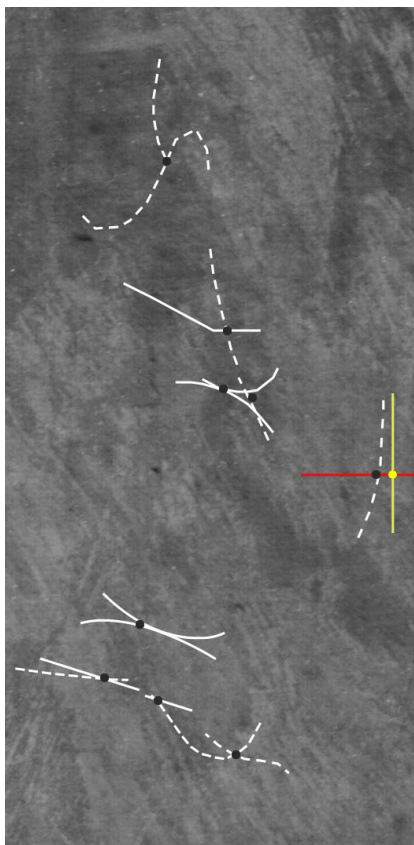


Ephemeral edge of water

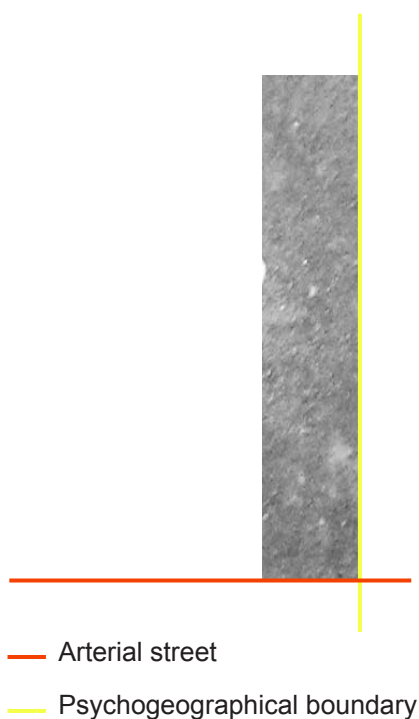


Ephemeral edge of the archive

Within the interior walls of the archive, the city documents – or memories – are organized into small containers and stacked upon each other in sliding drawers. New memories overlap old ones until the drawers are full. Drawers can be pulled out individually to serve as stairs with which researchers can navigate the entire archival space, ascending and descending as they travel back and forth through different historical periods. It is necessary to physically move upward or downward in order to reach different layers of time, and to be aware that the stairs themselves are also in motion, constantly being moved by visitors in order to reach different areas. The various shapes and contours created by these staircases are therefore entirely transitory. As tides of researchers push drawers in and out to unearth more memories – or to create more stairs – they shift and alter the environment in a way which is strikingly reminiscent of how the original shoreline here was once affected by the ocean tides.



Location of archive of people



Relationship with the “walls”

## Archive of People

Across from archive of the city is the archive of people, it is situated at the edge of human settlement – the most recent “wall” of the site – which forms a psychological and geographical boundary between False Creek Flats and the surrounding neighborhood. This choice of location reflects the fact that settlement of a place begins with the arrival of its people.

In contrast to the archive of city, the people’s archive is a depository of personal memories. Citizens of Vancouver will each be assigned a box in which to deposit objects which are meaningful or carry important memories for them, and the box is theirs to use for the duration of their lives. When older citizens pass away, their boxes are taken over and passed along to the newly born. In this way, citizens will be constantly swapping memories with each other and seeing old memories replaced by new ones.

The boxes are held in place by scaffolding as a gesture of deliberate ambiguity, as the frame is both solid and largely insubstantial. It is a permanent structure, but may appear to be a temporary measure. The gridded texture of the archive allows memories from across a wide span of time – past, present, and future – to be physically mounted on a single spatial and experiential plane. The memories are not layered here, they are fragmented.



The archive expands as the population increases, forming a landscape which represents the growth of Vancouver. It can also function as a mnemonic device for individual citizens, since viewing landscape even from far away may help them to recall the memories they have deposited there. This space devoted to the collection and recollection of personal memories is like a kite flown by every inhabitant of the city. Their kites flying aloft in the sky may seem unreachable, but each one of them is held by the hand of an individual person, standing on the ground.



Archive of people: collecting and recollecting of memories.



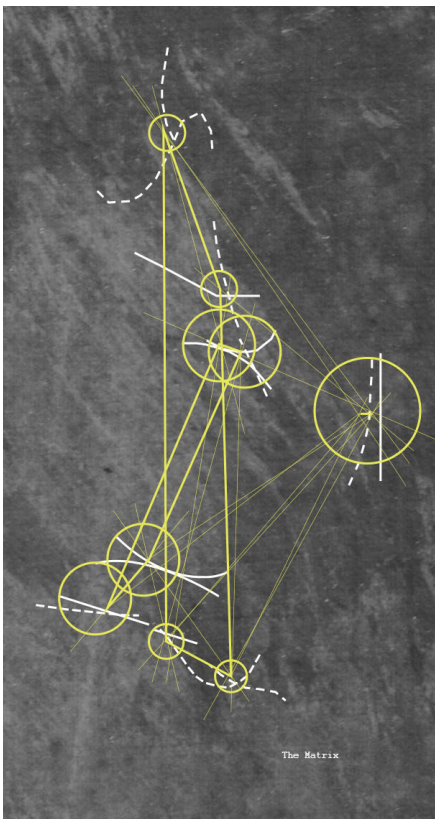
Section of archive of people: "memory kites" flying in the archive



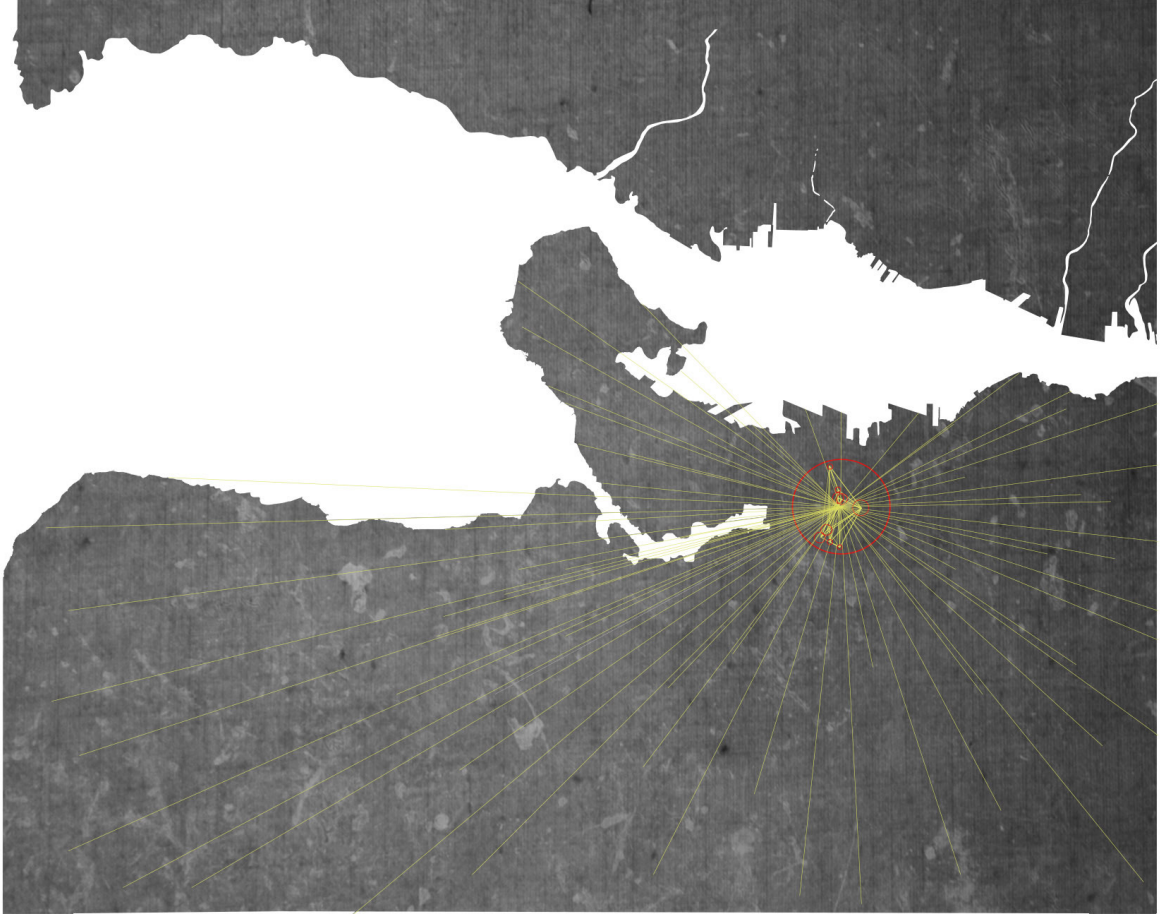
## The Matrix

Together, the follies interact forming a matrix, which act as a structuring device for the site and has significance for the city of Vancouver as a whole. The Matrix not only responds to the context of its location, but also confers identity and a powerful sense of place on the currently neglected region of False Creek Flats. The various elements addressed and explored by the Follies – fire, water, air, earth, sky, ground, city, people – are the joints that connect the Matrix to the larger city of Vancouver.

The matrix is not merely physical, however. It also represents a Matrix of the Mind in which elemental poetics reveal the powerful essence of a city saturated with history, memory and limitless imagination. Visitors may not be able to experience all of the Follies continuously, but the act of exploring even one may instill an appreciation for the poetic power of the others, or trigger related memories of other sites, far removed from the follies of False Creek Flats. Ultimately, no matter how visitors choose to interact with the site, the follies are places that can always be returned to, and where new levels of meaning can always be found.



The Matrix



The matrix in the city

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

False Creek Flats is essentially a void, an unfortunate by-product of settlement and industrialization. However, its emptiness can also be viewed as a blank canvas, presenting countless possibilities for new expressions and interpretations. The matrix translates the existing void through creating a new void. It is not an accidental one, as the current state of the flats. Instead, it is a series of elements that are used to hold space, so that the people who experience it define these new voids as spaces in the public memory and continuum of the city. These follies suspended between the realm of presences and absences likened to a void within a void, and even as the emptiness of the site is filled, the spirit of the follies remains. The follies, as the Chora of the site and city, is the very basis of mediation between past, present and future.

### **A Mediator**

The erased and over-written nature of False Creek Flats, as palimpsest is rewritten by the follies, which bring to light the traces of the past and giving them space to be present once more. As the site grows and develops, those traces may yet be erased, reformed or overlapped. However, the matrix will remain intact. Within the matrix, those absences are transformed into physical, architectural structures and experiences. This gives an alternative way to preserve the history of the city so that echoes of the past will continue to exist in the future.

The follies also form a mnemonic landscape that triggers memories, alters perceptions, and enhances the imaginations of those who experience them. In this respect, the follies are not only a physical mediator that connects the past, present and future of the site and the city, but also a stimulant of perceptual mediation concerning the historic transformation of the site so that the inhabitants may come to more fully appreciate and understand the history of the city as a whole.

### **A Chora**

As previously mentioned, Plato's conception of chora was as a transition between "being" and "becoming," between the intelligible and the sensible, between the material forms of this world and the ideal forms of a more profound reality (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2005).

The matrix constitutes a receptacle of inspiration and wonder within which the "being" of the site is unfolded and the "becoming" is catalyzed. Its architectural spaces are designed to effectively stimulate increased awareness of the "sensible" and the "ideal" through interpretations of the "intelligible" and the "material." As a result, the matrix is a Chora, where our perception of reality itself is expanded through the heightening of poetic awareness and dynamic imagination. Through Chora, we can achieve the "becoming" of the site and city whose inhabitants have a sensible consciousness of the notion of time and true appreciation of their physical environment. The inhabitants of Vancouver will surely continue to



create and recreate the city with new interpretations.

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